

## MARY THE PERSON BEHIND MARY THE DEITY

The human face of Mary began to disappear from Paul's dismissal and eviction from the Agora in Athens when the philosophers and leaders dismissed him as a "babbling" in response to preaching about a crucified God [ Acts 17: 16ff] . Thereafter his rhetoric and letters teach about a "resurrected" God as Christian teaching adopted the Platonist and Socratic approaches along with their Mt Olympus religion. This tactical change compounded the mistake at the Council of Jerusalem where they accepted a diversity of faith practices for Jews and Gentiles rather than a common one and then Peter and Paul had a massive argument when Peter refused to share a meal with Gentiles [ Acts Ch.11]. The final step was the incorporation by the Roman Empire from 311 and the translation of Scripture from Greek to Latin saw the disappearance of the human Jesus until the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well as the meanings of key Christian words like "love". It also meant a full embrace of the inferiority of women as chattels or legal property until 1974 in Australia.

The Catholic Church has 4 teachings about Mary. She was conceived without original sin. She was an eternal Virgin prior and after Jesus Birth. She is the Mother of God. She was assumed body and soul into heaven. While Luther and Calvin had no issues with her status later branches of Protestant belief rejected her exalted status due to the lack of scriptural evidence to justify these doctrines. Of the four teachings , the Assumption is the most interesting because it flowed out of the ordinary faithful's beliefs as there was no grave and a strong traditional belief in her final home at Ephesus with St John who makes an alleged reference to her fate in a metaphor in Revelation .

However what has been lost until the last 75 years is the real person. Her experiences are clearly described in the four gospels but our perception has always been directed to God or Jesus not from Mary's perspective.

Rationally and historically we can see why there is a belief about her Immaculate Conception underpinned by appearances to Bernadette at Lourdes and at Medjugorje where the image in white comes from and this title was mentioned. However we cannot ignore the special role assigned to Virgins in the ancient religions especially Diana, the daughter of Zeus who was the supreme idol of fertility. Sr. Rosemary Crumlin , an experienced art historian, has come across a sculpture where Diana has 999 breasts but Mary had 1000 breasts !

While it has been tradition that Mary only gave birth to Jesus, Fr Frank Moloney has suggested she could have had subsequent children because when she was betrothed to Joseph she had implicitly accepted their relationship would include a sexual relationship as a good and faithful Jewish couple. The references to Jesus four brothers and two sisters in Greek infer a close family sibling relationship rather than a distant one. The focus of the apostles that second coming was imminent and later influence of writers like Augustine about the "weakness of the flesh" add to the paranoia we had about sex and sexuality until modern psychology and other human sciences developed.

So when we stand in Mary's shoes , how would she feel and react in the following situations :

At the Annunciation, she is told she has conceived a son but in her head she knows that the community could condemn her to death for alleged adultery which she would have witnessed . She knows Joseph could shun her and walk away where she would be cast out by her family to beg on the street. She knows he could still marry her but she would spend the rest of her life 'in Coventry ' and be treated at a lower status than the pigs while her baby's head would be smashed against the pavement or left out in the fields for the wild animals to eat.

In her first trimester she visits Elizabeth across rough country when she was probably experiencing bouts of morning sickness as her 13/14 year old body accepted the pregnancy .

At the same time she has had difficult conversations with Joseph who had grave doubts which were overcome by dreams which re-assured him about raising someone else's son not his own.

In her third trimester, close to birth , she is transported by donkey from Galilee in the North to Bethlehem in the South across rough , dangerous roads for the Roman Census

She is denied a mother's privilege of giving birth where she has prepared the welcoming nest to have her brand new son laid in an animal trough in a cave surrounded not by family but lowly shepherds who slept in the fields with their animals.

At a later time , she is visited by three seers from Asia who are skilled in astrology who bring three gifts for a her son which are a portent for his future of gold , frankincense and myrrh

She then presents him for initiation at the temple where two elderly people greet her to remind her of his destiny and how his life will give her seven swords through her heart which we perpetuate in Our Lady of Sorrows which begins with Simeon's prophecy, flight to Egypt , losing Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem, meeting him on the road to Calvary , standing at the foot of the cross , taking his broken body from the cross , burial. But as parents, we can see many more heart rending moments like when he is evicted from Nazareth and rejected by his family when she has to make a choice to leave with him or stay with her family . When she is standing outside the building with her children and he says those inside are his family. At the wedding feast of Cana when he rebukes her for asking for help to provide more wine. The physical risks he ran in helping lepers and people with other illnesses. The constant threats to his life from his political and religious enemies because they had witnessed how cruel a death crucifixion was so often in life. The constant rough sleeping, lack of food and constant demands on his energy , skills and powers .The type of people he selected as his closest companions who constantly let him down or didn't quite pick up the bigger picture .Finally the Ascension where she had to say good bye not knowing for how long that would be after 33 year close relationship .

She is forced to flee across the desert for several years as a refugee with her infant son and husband for several years until Herod dies.

And as you read the rest of the narrative there was no real need to embroider the story we handed on in a myriad of prayers , mantras , images and institutions we now have honouring her place as our ultimate mother and mediator as the simple Hail Mary says it all.

The work of the terracotta artists in Italy during the 1960s when they show a teenage, middle eastern face in a substance that will attract dust and cobwebs summed up the real person she was in life and now in heaven while Michelangelo's Pieta sums up the mother's loss . Pope Francis fascination with Mary the Untier of Knots by Johann George Melchior Schmidtner around 1700 probably sums up where her lived life sits as spiritual inspiration for all of us in this time of Covid and Ecological Challenge.

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#### Postscript

If you check the various posts for Sunday which describe the appalling attitudes to women which begin with Tertullian who describes all women as the new "Eves" who seduce men from their truth paths, cleansing rituals after birth, encouraging fasting in young girls to suspend menstruation, the women had no souls until the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the fictions that Mary gave birth without pain or breaking her hymen to establish she was not Eve has been reproduced. As Catriona said yesterday, it is time for this nonsense to go.