



The Feminine Presence in the Mystery of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus



Luke, the Evangelist, records the presence from the very beginning of a feminine presence alongside of Jesus and the Twelve. In fact, by the end of the Infancy Narrative, Luke has spotlighted a unique woman, Jesus' mother, Mary. She was awaiting his birth, had given him birth, and had accompanied him to the end of his childhood. At the Presentation, along with Simeon, Luke presents the prophetess Anna, a woman committed to penance and prayer, who, under the power of the Spirit, proclaimed the coming of the Savior. And then he presents a group of women who follow the Lord, as he begins his work of evangelization.



Afterward he journeyed from one town and village to another, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. Accompanying him were the Twelve and some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their resources. (Lk 8, 1-3)

This is something new and outside of the usual societal practice. The Teachers of Israel were surrounded by disciples, but not by women who were not even considered worthy of sitting at their feet and receiving their instruction. Jesus, on the other hand, acknowledges their dignity and the importance of admitting them among his followers, certainly not for the sole purpose of attending to his and his followers' needs. Jesus makes them participants in receiving the Word and hearing the Kingdom proclaimed.

Christ, after three years of preaching, arrives at Jerusalem, where he knows his sacrifice will be completed for the redemption of the world.

As Jesus goes up the hill of Calvary, carrying the Cross, a mysterious woman appears to wipe his face; the tradition of the Way of the Cross calls her Veronica. This woman, by her careful and considerate response to the suffering of the Lord, is a sign and model of all women who bow down, lovingly, to attend to the injuries and suffering of their neighbor, and who generously spend

themselves to relieve and cure their discomfort.



However, Luke also introduces another group of women along the Via Dolorosa.

A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children, for indeed, the days are coming when people will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.’ At that time people will say to the mountains, ‘Fall upon us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’ for if these things are done when the wood is green what will happen when it is dry?” (Lk 23, 27-31)

Christ certainly accepts the tears of these women who are sharing in his suffering; but He also wants to orient them to another finality. He invites them to weep for themselves and their own children because of the catastrophe which will overwhelm Jerusalem just a few years later. These women are a sign of so many other women who today are weeping and sorrowing over the painful events covering the face of the earth: war, persecution, natural disasters. In their prayers they gather up the suffering of so many of our brothers and sisters, in whom Christ continues to suffer today.

However, the women do not only follow on the Via Crucis, they know to stand at the foot of the Cross as well. It is John, one of the Apostles who was present on Calvary who witnesses to this. *Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. (Jn 19, 25)* They are standing there, with His mother, strong women in spite of their sorrow, who want to share in the Passion of the Crucified. Humanly speaking, there is nothing that they can do for Him nor can they relieve His suffering; but their presence expresses the totality of their love and gratitude for Jesus who is laying down his life, even for them, through an act of absolute love. These women represent those who over the centuries have shared in the sorrow of Christ through their contemplation; or who have aided their brothers and sisters who have been gravely ill. Although they are unable to relieve their situation, they stand with them with love and tenderness, so that they will not feel alone or abandoned.

Just as women have had a prominent role in the Passion, so also do they take part in the Resurrection of Christ.

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb....But Mary stayed outside the tomb weeping. And as she wept, she bent over into the tomb and saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet where the body of Jesus had been. And they said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken my Lord, and I don’t know where they laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” She thought it was the gardener and said to him, “Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni,” which means Teacher. Jesus said to her, “Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary of Magdala went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and what he told her. (Jn 20, 1; 11-18)

Mary of Magdala, a resourceful woman, sets out early to the sepulchre once the Sabbath is past; and there she finds the sepulchre empty. Because of her great love for the Lord, she cries, fearing that his body has been carried off. She expects to find a cadaver, so in her sorrow she does not recognize Jesus who comes to her alive. It takes only His calling her by name for her to recognize Him, and call him “Teacher.” Mary is the first one to encounter the Risen Lord, from whom she receives her mission to go to her brethren; the Liturgy will call her the woman Apostle to the Apostles. In just a few words she condenses her extraordinary experience: *“I have seen the Lord!”* Then, she tells them what Jesus

said to her. Similarly, like Mary of Magdala, other women today anxiously seek Christ, and they find him risen and alive in the Church, in the Word of God, and in the Eucharist. They announce this to their brothers and sisters with great joy because in Him they have life in abundance.



Additionally, Matthew recounts that the women went out to the sepulchre at dawn; they saw an angel there who said to them: “...*Do not be afraid! I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ Behold, I have told you.*” Then they went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed, and ran to announce this to his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them on their way and greeted them. They approached, embraced his feet, and did him homage. Then Jesus said to them, “*Do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.*” (Mt 28, 5-10)

Having left the sepulchre, the women see the Risen Lord who has come out to meet them; and with tender love they embrace his feet and adore their God who has conquered death. Twice, first by the angel, and then by Christ Himself, they have been given the missionary mandate to announce to the Apostles that He lives, and that He will reveal Himself to them. These women recall for us how to simply and yet intensely demonstrate love for the Lord who is today present in His Church. After having encountered Him, and worshipped Him, they announce His presence to their brothers and sisters, especially to those who are seeking a meaning for their lives.

The centuries that have passed since the Resurrection dawn! Still, the proclamation has not been suspended: “He is risen from the dead. I have seen the Lord!” So many are the men and women who have repeated the exclamation through their lives of prayer, or in dedicating themselves to their families, or by proclaiming the Gospel as missionaries in their service to the poor and those who suffer.

Counted among the contemplatives for the last 250 years are we Passionist Nuns. We—called to share primarily in the suffering of the Crucified, and to relieve the sorrows of our brothers and sisters who relive His Passion. We—called to weep over the sins of the Church and of the world, which have been the cause for the sufferings of Jesus, and to implore mercy and salvation for all people. We—standing at the feet of the Cross with Mary, our Mother, so that we can receive and offer the blood of Christ to the Father for the salvation of humanity. We have been called to continue the announcement of the Resurrection of the Lord, a proclamation which for being shrouded in silence and prayer, is able to reach beyond the walls of our monasteries, and spread among peoples, reaching to the ends of the earth. This is made possible through the simplicity of life which was given us by our Founder, St. Paul of the Cross, and the example of the Co-Foundress, Ven. Maria Crocifissa. The wealth of teachings which we received from them have been reaffirmed in the recently approved new Constitutions.

The radical living of the evangelical counsels becomes for the Passionist Nuns a true paschal experience: a profound personal and communal realization of the death and resurrection of Jesus. They live their vows in the atmosphere of Christ’s sacrificial love and offer themselves with Him to the Father for the salvation of their brothers and sisters....The Passionist Nuns vow to live in the light of this self-sacrificing love of Jesus. As brides of the Crucified, their most profound longing is “to know him and the power of his resurrection and [the] sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to his death”. (Rule and Constitutions, Part II, #10 and #12)



The celebration of the 250th Jubilee of Founding is an opportunity for all of us Passionist Nuns to be renewed in our vocation as successors of the first women disciples of the Lord. Let us be united with Him in the Passion at the foot of the Cross; and let us discover Him risen and alive in our daily life.

It is a grace of the Spirit that we are continually invited and encouraged to deepen the awareness of our Charism in the Church. Let us not let this opportunity pass for nothing. Let us pray for one another so that this grace will be fruitful in each Nun, and in our Communities.



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