

The 66th Annual Pilgrimage of Our Lady of Walsingham

A Meditation at A Service of Prayer and Meditation, 3.00pm 12 October 2018
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Meditation 2: The later words of Mary to Jesus

We are reflecting on the 6 Words of our Lady Saint Mary in the Scriptures. At our first meditation, we reflected on our Lady's correspondence with the Archangel Gabriel, the first two quotations that we have. Now, in this meditation, we consider the 4th, 5th, and 6th quotations. We are skipping the third, because it is important, and famous, and we'll be encountering it in Evening Prayer, because we always do.

The fourth Word of our Lady comes from Luke, chapter 2. The fifth and sixth Words of our Lady comes from John, chapter 2. These are two very different events, but I am forced by the structure of the day to mush them together. Perhaps we will find a wholeness in the juxtaposition. Perhaps setting these events side by side will help us to see them afresh. That can happen sometimes.

~ The fourth Word: Mary's Anxiety ~

The fourth word of our Lady Saint Mary is this: "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." Do you recall the episode?

Everyone has gone up to Jerusalem for the festival. The whole family, friends, probably half the village has gone together, a great roving party all the way down and back. But Jesus got separated from the group, and apparently it was a whole day before Mary and Joseph noticed. This is shocking to us today. The parents here will know of the panic that can grip you in seconds when the kids wander off in the store. It can happen in the blink of an eye, and it is a terrible feeling. But these were different times then. People watched out for each other. But also I think children grew up faster. Jesus is twelve at this point. Almost 13. Almost a man, at least in the eyes of his heritage.

So Mary and Joseph rush back, and for three days they search for Jesus. They find him, of course, in the Temple, and this is when our Lady Saint Mary says this fourth word: "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety."

Jesus seems surprised, and says that surely they should have figured out that he'd be in his father's house, etc. etc. We find out that Jesus was a very special boy, brilliant and clever and all the rest of it. Truly a child that could make his mother proud! I was twelve once. I was precocious. I was already well on my way to my firm belief that I had the world figured out and knew everything. That lasted for a while. Now, of course, the older I get the more I doubt that I really have anything figured out. Perhaps this is wisdom, to let experience

scrub the thorns off your certainty. On the other hand, Jesus is God incarnate, so he knows what he was talking about.

But we are focusing on Mary's word. "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." I have no great observation to make here, except to honor Mary's anxiety. We sometimes think, or sometimes I think, that the religious life is a very peaceful one. And the closer any of us get to Jesus, surely, the more peace we must feel. Peace be with you, he said, my own peace I leave with you.

But Mary speaks here of her anxiety, her worry. And then we remember earlier, when Gabriel visited her and reminded her not to be afraid. And we remember how close Joseph had come to dismissing her, even if he was going to do so as gently as possible; she must have known the risk. And then the worry and fear of trying to find a place to give birth, and the worry and fear of Herod murderer hunting for her child, and, oh the guilt must have been terrible when she found out about the Holy Innocents.

Julian of Norwich writes of a vision of Mary at the foot of the cross. "Here I saw part of the compassion of Our Lady Saint Mary, for Christ and she were so one-ed in love that the magnitude of her love cause the magnitude of her pain."

I was going to quote a bit more, but it strikes me that that is the perfect place to stop. The magnitude of her love caused the magnitude of her pain.

She was his mother, and he was both her son and her savior. He was the source of so much joy, but then also he was the cause of anxiety. Of pain and worry. We shall hear in a moment that sometimes he could even be curt with her. Simeon warned her that a sword will pierce her own soul. This whole time I have thought he meant the pain she would find at the foot of the cross. But our hearts can be pierced in so many ways, great and small. We know it in the church, certainly — that we really cannot live the Christian life without the church, and yet it can hurt us so deeply.

The magnitude of our love causes the magnitude of our pain. But, I think love is worth it.

~ The fifth and sixth Words: Mary, Intercessor ~

The fifth and six Words of our Lady Saint Mary come from a later episode, and from a different gospel. The fifth word of Mary is this: "They have no wine". The sixth word is this: "Do whatever he tells you."

We are in Cana of Galilee, and we are at a wedding. The wine has run out. Mary's the one to point this out: "They have no wine." Jesus replies, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." [Perhaps this is another little bruise]

Mary says to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you".

So words 5 and 6 come quickly, one word to Jesus, and one word to the servants.

The first thing to notice here is that Mary is the bridge here. It is she who brings the need to Jesus. It is she who counsels the servants to heed Jesus. This, my friends, is intercession. When we pray the Hail Mary, pray for us now and in the hour of our death, we are imploring her intercession. And Christians have done the same in countless prayers. Probably you who are drawn to Sheboygan, to Walsingham, to the pilgrim's path, to this day — probably you do not need to be told this, but we often are blessed by the reminders.

Mary intercedes for us. And this is what her intercession looks like — Jesus, they have no wine. And so she does, even right this very moment, imagine her touching Jesus on the shoulder and saying “My son, do you know this one's need? Do you see this one's suffering? And this one is lost today and seeks you, can you see it?” Of course he does, just as he could see with his own eyes that they were out of wine, but it was in her nature to assist, to point out, to close the gap, to intercede.

This is what her intercession looks like — Servants, do whatever he tells you. This is Mary, mother of the Church. Now here is an interesting thing. In the West there are many statues and paintings of Mary when she is by herself, but in the orthodox east, she is almost always with Jesus. In so many icons our Lady is depicted pointing to Jesus. Showing him to us. In the Salve Regina we sing: *Et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui, nobis post hoc exilium ostende.* And after this exile, show us Jesus, the blessed fruit of your womb.

Thus, our beloved image of Our Lady of Walsingham holds Jesus on her lap, holds him up and out for us to see. Servants, Christians, this is my son, the beloved, do whatever he tells you.

And so we move towards another time of silence. Mary pondered all these things in her heart. What will you ponder in yours?

Perhaps you will ponder the Sorrowful Mother the mother who worried, who was afraid, who watched her son grow up and, as children have to do, no longer need her as he once did. Maybe your own hidden wounds — grief, regret, anxiety, sorrow — will find the comfort of solidarity with our Lady Saint Mary. The magnitude of her love caused the magnitude of her pain.

Perhaps you will ponder Mary Help of Christians, intercessor and guide, and thus a role model for you. Maybe the wine has run out somewhere near you. You too are equipped by your baptism to remind Christ of the needs you see. You too are equipped by your baptism to do what Jesus tells you to do, and to encourage your fellow servants to the same work.

Our Lady of Walsingham, show us always the joy of the annunciation, and pray for us.
Amen.

