

## WHO I WAS BORN TO BE (Lk 1:39-56)

Throughout history women have played an important and vital role in the shaping of our world, and none more so than the woman we honor today, Mary, the mother of Jesus. Even though it may be that it is mostly men who are the celebrated ones in history books, we have to remember that it was also men who wrote those same history books. Even the 4 gospels are attributed to men: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And yet women were **very** prominent in the life and circumstances of Jesus' life. There was Mary, his mother, at the wedding feast of Cana, the site of his first miracle, directing him that it was time to begin. There was the anonymous woman at the well who became his first evangelist calling the towns people to come and see the one who had told her everything about her life. There was Mary Magdelene who was the first to witness the Risen Christ. And there were so many more women throughout the years of Jesus' ministry. What a different, and maybe fuller, perspective we might have of the life of Jesus if some of these women had recorded their encounters with and thoughts about their interactions with the Son of God. Luke is the only gospel writer who gives us insight into the personhood of any of these women when he describes Mary's reactions to her role as the handmaid of the Lord.

What is it about Mary that inspires such devotion in some and in others such divisiveness? Mary herself always pointed to God as the one who provides life and blessing. She saw herself as only someone who reflected and manifested the greatness of her God, calling herself His handmaid, in those days a term which meant a slave. She believed in her son as the one sent by God to be the Messiah of the world. So we can be sure that when we pray for Mary's assistance in anything, she will point straight to God and will serve to have His will carried out in response to our petitions.

My mother prayed to God through Mary for her assistance, appealing to her as one mother to another. After I was born, she was told by her doctor that she could not have any more children or it would kill her. Nevertheless, she did get pregnant and beseeched Mary that she could give birth to the child within her and that she would live long enough to raise her children to adulthood. Knowing my mother, she probably stormed heaven with her prayers, pounding on its doors, like that woman in one of Jesus' parables who badgered the judge until he relented and gave her what she wanted. Well, my mother got what she prayed for: she survived my brother's birth, who was born on Mary's birthday, and she lived a long life.

We are very familiar with the prayer which Jesus taught us; today we hear the prayer which Mary gave us, the Magnificat, and it provides rich insight into her

relationship with God. This 13/14 year old girl proclaims the greatness of the Lord and her blessedness in the most scandalous position of her life, pregnant and not married. But believing in the mercy and trustworthiness of God, she is filled with life and ecstatic at being used by God. In her prayer she proclaims that God will correct the injustices of the world, and we see in the life of Jesus that that was the way he lived, correcting injustices and calling us to do the same. Mary was a simple girl from Nazareth, a small town in Galilee. She lived in poor circumstances during her life, becoming the wife of a carpenter. Shortly after the birth of her only child, she had to flee to Egypt, a place that was a past life of slavery for the Jewish people, because King Herod and his army wanted to kill her son. I can't imagine the terror that she had to live in with the forces of the world stacked against her. And eventually she would hold the mutilated body of her son in her arms close to her breast after he had been tortured, humiliated, and put to death for no crime at all, but simply because the authorities feared his message of truth and of love. Mary is great because of her faith in God. She allowed God to work totally in her and through her. And so she has been rewarded with that promise of eternal life which we all desire, being assumed body and soul into heaven where she lives with her son and with our Almighty Father. This has been celebrated by the church since the earliest days.

TV fare these days seems to be an endless stream of what are called "reality shows," some of which are talent searches for the next great performer. On one of the British reality shows, a woman stepped on stage and when asked what she was going to do replied that she was going to sing. You could almost read in the facial expression of one of the judges the thoughts going through his mind. They seemed to be very cynical and to say, "Yeah, right. You sing? The things I have to endure in this job." This woman wasn't young or pretty; in fact, she was very plain, middle-aged, never married, having lived at home with her mum all of her life, the very definition of a spinster, and looking very frumpy. When she opened her mouth and started to sing, you heard a "thunk" as the judge's jaw hit the desk. Nothing could have prepared any one for the sheer beauty and power of her singing. Her name is Susan Boyle, and she has become very well known for her singing in the past couple of years. The other day I was listening to her sing the song "I Am Who I Was Born To Be." And I could feel the power of those words coming from this woman who has found who she was born to be. The greatness of God sometimes comes from common, ordinary people. There was nothing to suggest that Susan Boyle could sing so beautifully and powerfully. There was nothing that would have pointed to Mary as the mother of the Messiah. Both were plain, ordinary people.

Elizabeth declared to Mary who she was born to be when she greeted her with the words, "Blessed are you among women ... And how is it that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Elizabeth was much older than Mary and recognized the gift of God as it entered into her presence. Mary, too, knows that she is who she was born to be as she exclaims, "My soul proclaims the greatness of

the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior ... All generations from this day forward will call me blessed." There was no bragging or boasting with those words, only complete recognition of God's greatness being manifested in her life.

That is the calling of each and every one of us: to be able to say that "I am who I was born to be." Our soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord as we live out our life doing God's will in gratitude for His great gifts to us. This doesn't mean that we have all the answers that life presents to us but rather that we live with the questions of "why" --- why was I born into this family at this time, why do I have all of these impediments in life, why do such bad things happen to me, and on and on and on --- and trust that God will work things out according to His divine plan. May we take comfort in knowing that we have a mother in heaven who prays for us to be who we were born to be.

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