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“Standing by the cross of Jesus was his mother” (John 19:25).

Gen 3:9-15, 20; John 19:25-34

We begin the long liturgical season after Pentecost (now called Ordinary Time) with a commemoration of Mary as “Mother of the Church.” This reminds us that Mary was present with the 120 followers of Jesus on the day of Pentecost. Luke may be linking that event in Acts with the scene in Luke 1:26 when the same Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary and she conceived Jesus in her womb. The Spirit is again hovering over a small group of believers who have been praying for the past 10 days since Jesus departed at the Ascension. As promised, on Pentecost Day they become the church. The Word of God becomes flesh in them. They are members of the body of Christ, the presence of the crucified and risen Jesus in the world.

At the end of Vatican II, the majority of the bishops chose to incorporate Mary into the Constitution on the Church rather than give her a separate document. This was to emphasize that Mary is not above and beyond us but one of us. She is a member of the church and the perfect model for what a disciple of Jesus should be. We relate best to her by imitating her openness to the Word of God, inviting it to become flesh in us, carrying it to term in our spiritual development, then giving birth to it through our witness to the Gospel.

The desire to elevate Mary as a mother figure is encouraged by today’s Gospel passage from John, in which Jesus entrusts the disciple and his mother to each other. He takes her into his home. This intimate mother-son spirituality easily took hold in

the church, in part because of the heavily masculine imagery for God as Father. Popular devotion to Mary filled the human need for the maternal care and unconditional love of a heavenly mother

Today's reading from Genesis adds perspective to the Gospel scene in which Jesus dies on the cross and his side is pierced. Like Eve, who comes forth from the side of Adam while he sleeps, so the church is symbolically born from the side of Jesus in blood and water, the principal sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. An exegesis of these overlapping texts reveals the evocative nature of John's Gospel as all the signs converge and are fulfilled in the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus. Birth flows from death, shame becomes glory, obedience redeems disobedience, paradise lost is paradise restored.

The time of Pentecost invites us to say yes to the Word in us so that the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus can take hold and unfold in our consciousness. Sunday by Sunday, scripture by scripture, we are meant to be imbued with the Christian Spirit. In this we imitate Mary, who helped midwife and mother her companion disciples in an encounter with the Holy Spirit she was already living.

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