Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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“From that hour the disciple took her into his home” (John 19:27).

Mary, Mother of the Church

Gen 3:9, 15, 20 or Acts 1:12-14; John 19:25-34

Marian devotion has always been a significant part of the church's spirituality. In a sense, the maternal role of Mary has served as a balance to the traditionally male designation of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), and millions of Catholics over the centuries have found it easier to pray to a mother figure than a father one.

The question of Mary's relationship to the church was given a thorough vetting during the Second Vatican Council, when the assembled bishops voted to incorporate Mary into the document on the church rather than give her a separate document. Their theological intent was to affirm that Mary is one of us - part of the church, an exemplar of Christian faith for all of us - rather than a figure who transcends the church or as a mediator to God, though popular devotion and countless Marian shrines around the world reinforce this belief.

Despite the majority recommendation to incorporate Mary into the church, today's feast of Mary, Mother of the Church, was promulgated by Pope Paul VI at the end of the Council and put on the official church calendar by Pope Francis for this time after Pentecost.

The readings emphasize Mary's presence with the disciples as they prayed for the coming of the Holy Spirit. What happened for her at the Annunciation when she accepted the Word into her womb was, in a profound sense, repeated as the Holy Spirit filled the praying church on Pentecost.

The reading from the fourth Gospel - in which the beloved disciple was directed by Jesus from the cross to receive Mary as his mother and to take her into his home - also affirms the relationship of all disciples to Mary as mother. Anyone who prays the rosary or says the "Memorare" prayer will understand the power of cultivating a deep relationship with Mary as a key to understanding Jesus.

The richness of faith available to us within the church offers many approaches to prayer and devotion suited to personal needs. The important message of today's feast is that Mary and all the saints model for us the path to God that opens wide as we seek to follow Jesus.