

In the Gaze of His Mother

by

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(Anne, a lay apostle)

In the maternal human gaze of his mother, Jesus rested in the power of the Father. Our Lady provided for the Lord a connection with divine parentage. Jesus counted on Mary to restore him and refresh him, because regardless of any event in the Lord's lifetime, Mary's gaze reminded Jesus that something bigger was at play. Resting in the presence of Our Lady, and connecting to God through another human being, provided comfort and consolation to Jesus.

In the same way, connecting to another human being who resonates with the Spirit of the Father, also supports and consoles us. Every person craves the reassurance of the Father's Spirit of total love and acceptance. Every person craves the reminder that there is always something bigger at play, even in the midst of unthinkable human circumstances and events. Communion with the Spirit of the next world can be considered an irreplaceable stabilizer during our time on Earth.

We, those who serve the Father's interests as set out for us in the life of the Lord, Jesus Christ, especially crave the reassurances we find in the eyes of those who resonate with him. We, those who serve the Father's interests as set out for us in the life of the Lord, Jesus Christ, are uniquely placed to offer this reassurance to other people in the world. In fact, it is safe to say that if we do not offer this for people, it is not actually available in the way that the Lord intends it to be available.

Anyone can tell another person that all things will work out in the end. But only those who follow Jesus Christ can tell another person, with the authority of our eternal Father, that it will all work out in the end in a way that possesses the hugeness of Heaven, our eternal home and our eternal haven.

This methodology, that of receiving directly from Heaven the resonance of God and then remaining available to offer it to others, truly depicts Mary's constant and firmly held state of being during her time on Earth.

"Get up and eat, or the journey will be too long for you" (1 Kings 19).

Jesus received from Mary, in an ongoing way, strength for the journey. His commitment to his mother confirmed in him the single-minded purpose he required to establish himself as King and offer himself fully to the divine plan. When religion becomes a god as opposed to glorifying the one true God, enormous and radical revision is required. So it was in the time of our Lord. So it is now. In both times and in all times, Jesus Christ is the answer and the way.

He would likely say that he was sustained through the resonance Mary maintained with God, the Father, through the Spirit.

We, as followers of Christ and imitators of the Queen of Saints, must strive for this same resonance. We follow Jesus. We strive to do so as Our Lady did. This stance, praising the Father and thus drawing down a blessing for all of mankind, became exemplified in the life of Mary. Mary held a position of humility and deference to God. She did so as both the mother of Christ and then the mother of the Church and finally as Queen of the Church.

We are each called to parent those whom God sends into our lives, as Mary did, always concerning ourselves with the Father's plan for them as a priority. That stated, there can be no confusion that the humanity of an individual should be disrespected as a means to greater holiness, meaning, to be clear, our humanity is a gift from God that should be cherished and lovingly cared for by us as an example, not overly cared for, but lovingly cared for and respected. When mother or father refuses to retain dignity through healthy self-care, he or she risks communicating that the expectations of the Father are unreasonable or difficult to achieve. This is not so. God's expectations are reasonable. There come moments where we must subordinate our human needs to the needs of the divine plan, meaning, sacrifice for greater holiness or for the needs of another, but generally speaking we must care for the plan of the Creator by caring for the humanity of our body.

Those who present the life of the body as somehow dangerous to the life of the Spirit promote a dualistic view of what God created. This distortion supports the notion that the Father holds unrealistic expectations for us. When we subdue and suppress the body in a way that results in scrupulosity, we present the smallest version of life in Christ. When, on the other hand, we are friendly toward our body with healthy self-care and movement, meaning, a practice of regular exercise, etc. we promote instead the true hope of God which is that we will be happy in our body and allow it to provide a home for the soul which is calm and steady. The greater the division between the body and soul, the greater the distortion, meaning, the idea that the body mysteriously wants what is bad for the soul. If the body is craving that which will distance us from God, it is because we have dabbled in something that now draws us or because we have unhealed wounds. We are in control, generally speaking, of what our body comes into contact with in the way of entertainment, for example. God is not offended by our temptations. He is offended when we blame others for the presence of the temptations and behave as though God, Himself, created the

conditions for sin. God has created conditions for virtue. We must take responsibility for our experience on Earth, to the best of our ability, and offer the body a healthy experience.

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We must all be available to provide an encounter with God's grace for others. When people encountered Mary, the mother of Christ, they encountered the Father of humanity. Because Mary held her position as God's choice for maternity, people could relax into God's grace when in her presence. When people rest into God's grace, they calm. We all need this but there are few who are willing to hold the position necessary to provide it for others.

We might wonder how to remain in place, that is, in resonance with God. The answer is simple. We must hold a position of humility. We must emulate our Lady whose only desire was to offer God's love to the people around her. There was a way to live and there exists still a way to live and Jesus, with the cooperation of his mother, established that way, the Christian way. Few people, when they talk about Christianity, remember that Jesus Christ acted with mercy, often against those who doggedly promoted the structure over the Spirit. We, Christians, must insure that our structures are edifices of the Spirit. Our Lady both talked and walked in the Spirit.

What is a symptom or sign of the Spirit?

Our Lady gave thanks and praise to the Father in all circumstances. She saw herself as a disciple and apostle, both. She studied God, through her religion and through her Son and she followed both. She contemplated God's goodness, God's providence. She lived in paradise, thus, because she remained constantly connected to God's care for her. Our Lady lived in a way that might be opposite to the experience of many today, therefore, her way must be studied with concentration in order to help us undo or unlearn some of modern life and return to a more primitive manner of relating to the Father.

When people use the word primitive it is used often in a derogatory manner. This is the opposite. In the context of Our Lady's faith, we use the word primitive to communicate completeness. Mary lived within God and her awareness that she existed within God's being and God's care meant that anything on Earth added to that total immersion or conflicted with it and could thus be discarded. Lest anyone believe that they encountered more Pharisees in the time of Christ

than we in our time, let us look no further than constant brazen attacks on our Popes. A primitive faith means retaining a disposition of total relationship with God. There must be a space around that person who holds this disposition. When something resonates with God it can proceed toward the person. When something is discordant with God let us say that it grounds out before reaching the person.

Mary was that way.

Her relationship with providence was complete and primitive. Mary felt herself blessed at all times, even when God seemed to be providing education through suffering. A primitive and total commitment means that we accept good news with joy and bad news with joy for the lessons and experience. A primitive relationship with God means that God can surround us and hold us in his being and from that space, that God jurisdiction, we communicate him out to others. There is no real human agenda from this space. God's desires will have their way with people like this because they do not leave the divine will.

The Queen of Saints worked like this; she resonated with God in an uninterrupted way. She was created for this, yes, but she also chose to remain in the divine will during her life. Her choice to remain with God in a primitive and total way brought her suffering, unseen to us in this time. Yet, her choice to retain a totally abandoned state of being, freed her to live the divine life on Earth. When one gives all to God, one is free to create with him. Mary did so. She provided ongoing solace to the King, her son, through her constant choice and through her determination to see every moment from God's eyes in trust and courage. She would not say she was brave. She would say she was cherished and thus relaxed about life. She knew she was loved and the love of the Father made her strong.

We each have the choice to remain fixed in this love of the Creator. We each have the choice to live a primitive trust in God which will free us to create for him and with him on Earth. Our Lady, by the time she had Jesus, would have been fixed in this disposition and therefore the next steps into the plan were simply small forward footfalls.

God can do big things with people willing to be small. For people who insist on being big? God must make do with small plans.

Which do we want? Do we want God to have the option of a big plan for us? Then we must spend our whole life studying Mary's small, humble way of going on. She did not need to be important in life because she understood how completely she was loved. When people know they are loved, indeed cherished, they will do anything needed as their response. God needs us to teach people how adorable they are to him and those people who are properly presented with this and who are formed this way will serve as Our Lady served. Completely.

A sin-based spirituality and formation will never produce followers like Mary. It simply cannot.

Mary was virtue-based. Talking about sin to Mary would not only bore her, she would depart from our company. Talking about virtue, humility, service and mercy and God's love would resonate with Mary and animate her fully and thus enter her soul. There is joy in this type of primitive faith. We must choose joy, for the sake of our own experience and also to insure the future presence of the Church in many parts of the world.

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From her state of being, totally immersed in God's love, Mary spread confidence to everyone she encountered. Life was meant to be lived, yes, for a purpose of higher illumination. Those who encountered Mary could only have learned about God's love for us and God's hope for us.

In these days, our Church often looks like a political arena or a secular effort. People squabble and join factions for or against this person or persons or this teaching or that interpretation. Mary lived differently. She would have reflected virtue in all whom she encountered. If a person showed anything good, any positive instinct or loyalty to a loved one or an ideal, Mary would have shined a light on that aspect of the person. She would have recognized God's Spirit in that element of the human being living life on Earth. She would have fully understood the reasons for the lack of virtue, perhaps in other areas. For that reason, Mary possessed the ability and capacity to celebrate God's presence in almost everyone she met. If a person was indisposed to God, meaning, full of his or her own importance and agenda, Mary would have simply moved on. She would not have spilled her life force in a negative effort like water on concrete instead of on crops. Mary moved forcefully through life, but in a quiet manner. The force that emanated from her presence was one of purity and strength. Her force healed and instructed.

A concern regarding the way Mary is known may be around her docility. People tend to believe that docility to God means that someone is a doormat on Earth, de-vitalized. Mary, as a mother, was a force to be reckoned with, like any mother. She was a warrior for God, an actively engaged apostle who knew better than anyone how to wage a war for the Truth about God and the discrepancy between religion as it was practiced and God's hope for his children. We must remember who Jesus, Mary and the apostles were up against. God's enemy of that time is the same as God's enemy of this time. The enemy has no concern for justice or fair discourse. The enemy avoids edification. The enemy distorts, thwarts, implies and schemes. Mary was fit for it. She is fit for it now. Her role now is the same as it was then. She is waging war for the Truth about God and the hope for the true religion established by her Son.

We must all bow our heads for a moment and accept that our Church does not look like it should.

Like any mother encountering a mess in her kitchen, we must strap on an apron and restore order. Men readers, apologies for the feminine perspective but I believe we could all do with more of it in our Church family. What is first? Well, when one is cleaning a kitchen after a time of neglect, one usually starts placing lids on jars and putting them away.

What is the equivalent in this time?

Perhaps it is putting human formation on top of the spiritual formation that we offer. What does a lid offer to a jar? It protects the contents. What does human formation offer to a person? It protects the contents of the mind, the thought processes, the understanding of virtue. Without human formation, we are offering a faith practice from the last century to a humanity who lives in another time entirely. We are like people selling horse shoes on the side of the highway. People need and want something different. People are entitled to more. Many look at what we offer and feel confusion. They know God is real, perhaps. They accept that the sacramental graces are perfect. But they cannot get behind the majority of what Catholics seem to celebrate as the highest version of the Catholic experience. To persist in last century's presentation is to reject the ever present movement of grace through time, it is to pretend that the Spirit has nothing further to offer or that the Spirit is unable to negotiate the present.

Development is not a threat to someone who understands God. Change is our reality. While many things do not change, i.e. the perfection of the sacramental graces, many things must, i.e. the way we integrate the sciences into our formation programs, the way we deal with our own dreadful failures as a faith community, the way we exclude women from leadership in the Church.

Right there, some readers will move into a hysterical defence of something that has not occurred. Some will screech '*the writer is trying to ordain women*', which would be untrue and which is not what was written.

We offer, currently, a lopsided ministry. An all-male structure means we are missing the feminine influence which many are convinced would have flagged and diminished the clergy abuse threat faster. There is an obvious reason women have not been welcomed in at the diocesan level and that is because there are no women in positions of leadership in that structure. I realize that many women serve faithfully. I pray that I am one of them. However, a formal role for women, diocesan mothers, will counterbalance and support the formal role of diocesan fathers (*priests*).

One part of the difficulty with this urgently needed development is that people are so busy defending the ordained clergy against women that they miss the point entirely. Why does anyone assume that women should take on a male role? Why does anyone assume that ordination is needed for women to serve in equality? Why do we not work steadily and confidently in the development of the feminine role, equal but separate and distinct? I realize that proposing an equal role for women in the Church may sound radical but all should know that it does not sound radical to most women. Many women serving, believe that their contribution is already equal in importance to that which is offered by our brothers. Some are way beyond this, of course, but others may need to open their minds calmly and help in the process of stabilizing the offering made by the institutional Church. Adding women to the effort will stabilize what we offer. This feels so obvious that any articulation feels like describing grass to ants. Why do we think men can do it alone? Why should they continue to be forced to try when it is not working?

What is the male role in the structure of the Church?

Fathers (*diocesan priests*) offer a sacramental role. This is a given and I am not writing about the priesthood here, except to rejoice in it, recommend it as a

valid course for many men and acknowledge that without it we have no bones, no structure.

Mothers should also be encouraged and allowed to offer a nurturing, developmental role, meaning, formation. Mother is acutely and instinctively aware of the growth and development of the growing child in the family and so must she be allowed to contribute the same for her parish and diocese. She, in the home, strives to bring about virtue and right thinking. She, in the parish and diocese, must offer formation that is consistent with contemporary knowledge, incremental, and geared to promote a virtue-based spirituality, undoing the sin-based spirituality of the past, which, it must be said, contributed to many psychological splits. A psychological split is when the outer self does not match the inner self. People have a secret belief that they are bad, something they believe they must conceal. This results in covert negative behaviors and beliefs, in addition to power imbalances that can result in things like clergy abuse, never mind all manner of spiritual abuse and distortion. Most importantly, someone who is suffering from a psychological split simply cannot accurately represent God. The representation will lack the depth needed to convict others.

The most relevant questions can be distilled down to two. What does Jesus, the Savior need? What does Mary, the Queen of Saints, wish to offer in the name of her Son and for her Son?

Jesus wants now what he wanted then, a humble, holy, healthy Church that stops pretending to be better than the people it serves. This means clergy and lay people alike, for the record. Something else we do that must stop is the action of limiting our talk of Church to clergy, which is like giving away our responsibility, right, and obligation to help with the changes and development. It is also like offering deference to men and then hating them for the position in which we have placed them. Clergy are people. They are human beings entitled to the same formation that we all require. Let it be said that many diocesan priestly formation programs are doing a great job offering contemporary formation based on the four pillars laid down in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, namely human, spiritual, academic, and pastoral. Changes have been made and we have positive indications that those changes are working.

If Jesus urgently requires a humble, holy, and healthy Church, who will He logically turn to in order to accomplish this? It must be Mary, his mother and the one person who lived life with a primitive and total trust in the Father. It must be Mary who so accurately represented the Father's hope and compassion for

each person, regardless of their state. It must be Mary, who fearlessly establishes virtue wherever she is present. Truly, Mary is needed to wage war against the obsession with all things sexual. Mary, mother, is truly aching to provide loving human assistance in this time of transition from the old to the new.

Who will Mary form to represent her? Mary will form women to teach others how to live as she did, with a primitive and total trust in the Father and his plan for humanity.

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When one possesses a primitive trust in providence, one is correctly disposed to serve God, because one trusts that everything is seen to. If we can park the bigger problems with God and all of his servants who surround us, then we are free to think creatively about our work. Our minds can muse on the potentials that surround us. Which potentials are most important to God's plan for the work of our hands? That is an exquisite and interesting question to pray about. Arguably, this question should get the biggest part of our focus each day.

The humility of Our Lady disposed her to remain perpetually available in the present moment. Her confidence in God's love for her enabled her to apply that love to every person she encountered. Mary, the mother of Jesus, loved with God's heart because she never left God's heart. In Mary, we have the highest example of the union between Creator and created together on Earth.

If women are following Mary, then they realize that their only desires must be for that which they need to do their work. Do women need to be ordained to do their work? That is the question that should instantly point to another, more important question, or perhaps the real question. What is the work that God urgently needs women to do at the diocese and parish level? What is their work? Ordaining women would simply distract them from the development of their role.

Also, it would detract from, or even be an insult to Our Lady's sublime contribution.

When something is not out there it is best to refrain from the discussion of it and move to the discussion of something that is out there. For example, if we must drain a bathtub there is not much point in talking about defrosting a

refrigerator that is still in a box. There is no job there, no task for the person charged with draining the bathtub. Comparisons are imperfect but they can be helpful with illumination. We must focus on what is our business and not what is not our business, especially in this time of constant ideas, much of them inflammatory, often pelted across time with immediacy.

We do not have women (*or men*) flocking to religious orders in 'first world' countries. What does that tell us? That religious orders are bad? No. That people are bad? No. It tells us that the call from God fits the past and has also developed to fit the time in which we live. Many holy young people, healthy and sound, want to serve God. They do hear the call, they do feel the draw, but there is nowhere for them to go which fits with their identity. Some would say that this means their identity is not holy. But that is ridiculous and outdated. In every time and every place, God calls people to serve him. But he does not call women in this time with a call from the last century. I realize I'm repeating myself, but we have failed to create a contemporary *entre'* for young people to serve the structure of our Church, the very bones. Those bones are crying out for the next generation. We have both the mandate and the opportunity to start something new and do it with people who are living in this time and possess the instincts of this time.

What are the risks in this time? God knows the risks are obvious. What are the remedies, then, that God wishes to send? Who is contemplating those questions instead of wailing about the greatness of the Church Past, all the while neglecting to dynamically and courageously create the Church Present to insure the health of the Church Future.

Lovely Catholic concepts await us. Lovely balanced programs which equip people to be happy and healthy despite modern scourges. Happy communities are possible where people hold their faith life as both a joy and a responsibility. Young people DO want to serve. Many young people, because of technology, feel, for instance, acutely the sufferings of Third World communities. This next generation does not respect damage to our planet and they are willing to reduce their standards of living a bit to enable other communities to come up a bit. Our children think globally. God likes this. God thinks globally, too.

That is where formation is required. This is where balanced and prudent leadership must assist the next generation in determining the highest Christian response to a rapidly changing world where someone else's problems will now quickly leak into our lives. Do we think we will live forever? What legacy does God hope we will leave our children?

When one spends time in a criminal courtroom, one quickly observes that there exists a pecking order, as in a chicken coop. Some, the deputies, possess a small piece of temporary authority with which to maintain order and safety. Some deputies inflate and become ridiculous, shouting and hauling people out of the room for things like loud yawning or what have you. Ridiculous inflation can be seen in many courtrooms. Upon consideration one could only conclude that these people thought they would live forever. They seemingly had no relationship to their mortality. Temporary power in a small arena tempted them to arrogance. This is humanity. This is what we look like in small arenas across the planet.

Where do we see this in the Church?

Why must we ask? Because when we see this, we can almost always discount the contribution of those who seize momentary attention to inflate and abuse power. This is a very real problem in our faith communities. In many places we see that the *'emperor has no clothes'* but everyone is afraid to say anything. Unless we absorb the feminine contribution, based on Mary's life, at the level of the structure or institution, we will continue to face attrition rather than growth. This is our real business. This is our life's work. Horizontal hostility in the Church and squabbling for power takes an enormous amount of energy that should go into creating the Church God wants and needs.

The Church is not a political arena where one strives to gain a consensus in order to effect a power grab. Our Lady would not support this and she is God's plan to renew and refresh our Church.

Some would argue that there can be seen two types of people working in the Church. One group is actually doing the work and the other seems to make war on the ones doing the work. This is not a perfect description but it will ring true for many readers who are working to create a holy present for a dynamic future. We must allow hope to pour into our beings, workers. God is with us and when we feel the most desolate then we might truly be at the doorway of success from God's eyes. Our mother, Mary, holds our bearing steady for progress. She is always pointing to personal holiness in her children called to effect renewal in the Church. If we concern ourselves with personal holiness, we will be small enough to tackle big jobs for God and Our Lady, herself, will direct our assignments.

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Followers of Christ strive to walk through their life after him. Mary shows us how to walk like her son. The arguments for the ordination of women come and go, rise and fall, peak and slide away again. But instead of asking for a position like Jesus Christ offered to men, women might ask for a position like Jesus Christ offered to Our Lady and wonder (*without delay*) what she desires to draw from our gender for the Church. Father and mother, the roles, the offerings, the 'ways of going on' will persist through time until the end of time. Therefore, we, as a faith community, should stare with anticipatory delight in that which Mary seems to be bringing about, that is, a feminine role to complement the role of the diocesan father, the priest.

There are those, namely Popes, with authority that comes from God. We believe this and we know it to be truth. These men discern carefully the questions of the times. People who act like Popes when they are not Popes, are political beings, gaging support and opposition. This grappling for consensus and power is an example of trying to view Heaven from eyes that are Earth bound. Is it possible that the Holy Fathers have held the space firmly for Christ, not in protection of the priesthood, although retaining ordination for men does protect the priesthood, but additionally in protection of what is to come, a newly revealed role for women that is consistent with their maternity and the needs of the human family for mother? When a discussion as crucial as this one takes on the adversarial tones that we experience, we can conclude that both creativity and discernment have left the building.

Why are so few engaged in the active development of a contemporary role for women at the diocesan level? This question must be answered.

Someone once said '*there are no women in the Church because there are no women in the Church*'. This was meant as a wry observation but it bears consideration. It would arguably be counter-intuitive for a man to begin a diocesan-wide organization for women. '*There are no women in the Church because there are no women in the Church*' might just hold true and might be correctly viewed as an initial hurdle to be jumped. We would be asking for a considerable stretch, for example, to ask a man to become, not only inspired, but passionate about a nursing group for young mothers. And yet parishes baptize baby after baby each year. In parishes where women have a leadership role, these groups, no doubt, exist. But in most parishes, they will not exist. Given the relationship between Attachment Theory, pro-social development

and our desire to promote virtue, this absence of support for mothers of young children is unthinkable, an enormous missed opportunity.

For the Church to develop, we must study that which is visible and that which is invisible. Mothers are intuitive. Mothers are good at the development piece in the family and fathers offer protection and support for the overall structure, leaving mothers, ideally, a little space to contemplate what is happening in the human and spiritual 'greenhouse' that is the family, with its developing members, and should, on a wider basis, be the Church. Nobody seems to be contemplating the development of our members. Nobody is calling out the psychological splits that occur when we isolate spiritual teachings from human development and achieve religious people who abuse others. Spirituality is not a science, after all. The human psyche was not created to be injured by spiritual formation, but set free. And yet we seem to have created conditions where the people best following the prescription exist in human pain and spiritual certainty, which is never a good sign!

Heed these words as the most sincere warning. Walking in the footsteps of God is not a robotic goose step. 'Goose-stepping', meaning, promoting the strictest, most legalistic type of Catholicism, drives out members and repels those who would otherwise be drawn to the Eucharist. Legalistic people cannot soar into the Invisible Reality with hearts full of hope that dare to risk the good to establish the great. No. They will only ever be able to extend the human structure in a halting way, filling it with broken, rigid ideologists who crave safety to soothe themselves from the pain of their wounds. People need soothing, always, but not in this way. Superiority marks the split and the split belongs to the unhappy and the spiritually handicapped. These people cannot effect Renewal and Renewal is our mandate.

Renewal must come, children of the Eucharist. Renewal is an international emergency on Earth. 'What is my role in the Renewal?' That is the question for all of us. If we work with young people (*and we all should in some way*) then we must insure human formation for them which sets their spiritual formation free. We look to the most successful American Indian tribes to observe the complementarity of the genders. Again, we could use that beautiful word *primitive* to describe what is actually advanced. In some tribes, women decided when to wage war. Largely, men waged it. Women had the authority to cease a war because they were in charge of the food and withheld it when they felt a war was no longer viable or necessary. The point is that authority was shared and the whole tribe prioritized the formation of the young. Everyone worked

together. That was the motto when it came to formation of young people. Without good formation of their young, the tribe's future became at risk. This is a simple formula, like 2 plus 2 equals 4. Without balanced, relevant and healthy formation of our young, the future of our Catholic Church, our tribe, is at risk.

Women must be equipped, empowered, and assembled to begin active human and spiritual formation programs in every parish and diocese. Children, to negotiate the age of technology, require information on how to protect and insulate their brains and minds in order to protect their souls. This is urgent. If Father's role in the diocese generally focuses on the sacramental, then mother must be placed in a position of equal authority generally focusing on the role of nurturing, with balanced human and spiritual development.

May God grant us the humility and wisdom to receive Mary's role and her maternal plan in this time.