Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Mary's faith unties the knot of sin (cf. Lumen Gentium, 56). What does that mean? The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council took up a phrase of Saint Irenaeus, who states that “the knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by the obedience of Mary; what the virgin Eve bound by her unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosened by her faith.”

The “knot” of disobedience, the “knot” of unbelief. When children disobey their parents, we can say that a little “knot” is created...Something of the same sort happens in our relationship with God. When we do not listen to him, when we do not follow his will, we do concrete things that demonstrate our lack of trust in him – for that is what sin is – and a kind of knot is created deep within us. These knots take away our peace and serenity. They are dangerous, since many knots can form a tangle which gets more and more painful and difficult to undo.

Even the most tangled knots are loosened by his grace. And Mary, whose “yes” opened the door for God to undo the knot of the ancient disobedience, is the Mother who patiently and lovingly brings us to God, so that he can untangle the knots of our soul by his fatherly mercy. We all have some of these knots and we can ask in our heart of hearts: What are the knots in my life? “Father, my knots cannot be undone!” It is a mistake to say anything of the sort! All the knots of our heart, every knot of our conscience, can be undone.

Do I ask Mary to help me trust in God's mercy, to undo those knots, to change? She, as a woman of faith, will surely tell you: “Get up, go to the Lord: he understands you.” And she leads us by the hand as a Mother, our Mother, to the embrace of our Father, the Father of mercies.


Painting by Johann Georg Melchior Schmidtner, commissioned by Hieronymus Ambrosius Langenmantel, dedicated to Our Lady of Good Counsel, attempting to unravel the knots of family life and history. This devotion was brought to Argentina by Archbishop Jorge Mario Bergoglio, S.J.
An unexpected statement from Vatican II about the Blessed Virgin Mary was the reference to her “pilgrimage of faith,” a theme which Pope John Paul II developed in his encyclical letter, *Mother of the Redeemer*, as he spoke of the Church’s pilgrimage of faith. The reference to Mary’s “pilgrimage of faith” was unexpected because pilgrimage implies movement toward a goal, and formerly we rarely thought of the Virgin Mary as progressing in her faith. But even the deepest faith, as was Mary’s, does not bring clear knowledge of the ways in which God sustains and accompanies our lives and our world.

The Gospels tell us about the life of Mary, and, at the same time, they present her in a larger context: first, as the personification of Israel, more specifically as Sion, awaiting the coming of the Redeemer. Together with Joseph, Elizabeth and Zachary, Simeon and Anna, Mary was part of the faithful remnant of the Chosen People, whose hope in the promise made to Abraham was sustained by the Scriptures, especially the psalms. The second way in which the Gospels outline the figure of Mary is as first disciple of Christ, the image and beginning of the Church.

The Annunciation and the Visitation are the two events of Mary’s life which resonate with themes from salvation history. At both events there was an outpouring of God’s spirit and prophecy. At the Annunciation, the first word of the Angel Gabriel to Mary was “Rejoice,” the word use by Isaiah, Zephaniah, and Zachariah as they spoke about the coming of God to earth. Gabriel told Mary that, by the Holy Spirit, she would conceive a son to be called Jesus, and that he would inherit the throne of David his father, that he would rule over the house of Jacob forever, and that his kingdom would last forever. But the nature of his kingdom and the way in which he would be received by this world was not at that time revealed to Mary. Pope John Paul II comments, “Mary had grown up in the midst of these expectations of her people: could she guess, at the moment of the Annunciation, the...
vital significance of the angel’s words? How is one to understand that ‘kingdom’ of which there would be no end.’

Mary’s response to Gabriel’s message was freely given, an expression of her whole person: “I am the servant of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” These words echoed and repeated the words which Abraham, Moses, and the people Israel expressed as they ratified the covenant. They are also found in Psalm 40; “Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will” — words which the Letter to the Hebrews places on Christ’s lips.

**BLESSED AMONG WOMEN**

With a new sense of mission, Mary hastened through the hill country to Ein Karem to share with Elizabeth and Zachary the joyful, near-incredible news which she heard. Filled with the spirit of prophecy, Elizabeth first greeted Mary by acknowledging the great blessing which made her unique: Mary was the “mother of my Lord,” and truly “blessed” among all women. Elizabeth then spoke of Mary’s faith: “Blest are you who believed that what was spoken to you would take place” (Lk. 1:45). Mary’s response, the Magnificat, also known as the Canticle of Joy, acknowledges “the great things” which the Lord accomplished. In praising God for looking upon his “servant’s lowliness,” she again identifies herself with the faithful remnant, the humble and poor, awaiting God’s redemption. Her song weaves together the themes from the psalms describing the Lord’s power to overturn and reverse the present situation and install a new order. Her song concludes in praise of God for his mercy to Israel and his fidelity to the promise to Abraham (Lk. 1:55).

**SHAPE IN THE ORDINARY**

But, after these joyful and Spirit-filled scenes, the Gospels record no extraordinary revelations to Mary. When the time came for Mary to give birth, she and Joseph were unable even to find a suitable place. The news of the birth of this child was revealed to the shepherds and to the magi. Following the star, the Magi came in their search of the one whom they identified as the “king of the Jews”; and when they saw the child with Mary his mother, “they prostrated themselves and did him homage” (Mt. 2:11). The shepherds recounted that the angels had told them that the birth of this child would bring a time of peace in the world. The Gospel records that “all who heard were amazed,” presumably including Mary, at the shepherd’s words; it then adds: “And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart” (Lk. 2:19).

As Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple to “present him to the Lord,” they encountered Simeon, a man who for many years was “looking for the consolation of Israel” (Lk 2:25). Filled with the Spirit (Lk. 2:38), Simeon testified that this child was the long-awaited Savior, “the light of revelation to the Gentiles and glory of Israel.” He prophesied that the child would be a “sign of contradiction, destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel” and that a “sword” would pierce the heart of Mary, a prophecy relating the mother to the sufferings of her son. Simeon’s words were a continuation of the message at the Annunciation, but now a description of the kingdom was given.

**LIVING WITH THE WAY**

When Jesus was twelve-years-old, on the yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover, he separated himself from his parents. When they asked why he had not informed them, Jesus replied, “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” These words were an indication that Jesus’ mission was much larger than his family. Mary was troubled at these words, which neither she nor Joseph understood. Here the Gospel tells us that Mary “kept all these things in her heart” (Lk. 2:51).

As Jesus began his public life, the differences between him, the people in his town, and even his own family appear to increase. Mark records that his relatives wanted to seize him: They thought “He is out of his mind” (Mk. 3:22). When Jesus received the message that his mother and cousins were standing outside asking to speak with him, his answer must have shocked his hearers: “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers? And pointing to
his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whosoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother and sister and mother.”

Similarly, a woman, who wished to compliment his mother, cried out “Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed, and the paps that sucked you.” Jesus appeared to deflect that praise of his mother as he said, “Rather blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it” (Lk. 11:27).

**LEARNING THE WAY**

Jesus’ central teaching was the proclamation that the Kingdom of God had arrived and that a new community of people was being created. This new community of Jesus was not based on the natural bonds of family; rather it was a family of disciples united in faith. In this new family, Mary’s relation to Jesus would take on a much larger dimension, one suggested at the marriage feast of Cana when Jesus addressed his mother as “Woman.” In Genesis, this title referred to Eve, the associate of Adam (Gen. 2:18) and the “mother of the living” (Gen. 3:20).

Mary stood at the foot of the cross with John, the Beloved Disciple. Mary shared in the suffering of her son, experiencing the “dark night” of faith as she tried to fathom how this moment was related to God’s plan. In his last moment, when Jesus was handing over the spirit (Jn. 19:30), he addressed his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” Then he said to John, “Here is your mother.”

**MARY, OUR MOTHER**

By this act, Jesus confirmed a new larger sense of Mary’s motherhood: Mary accepted John, the representative of the new community, who then took her into his own home. Rooted in the promises made to Israel, Mary represents Mother Sion, in whom all find a home (Psalm 87:7). She welcomes with a mother’s love all who have been scattered, are now gathered together in Christ (John 11:52).

Mary was part of the community of prayer as the apostles waited in the Cenacle for the coming of the Holy Spirit. “All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (Acts 1:14). Her faith in the living word allowed her to embrace the role which came into focus as she stood at the foot of the cross. She was to be associated with Jesus in bringing to new life the members of his Church, and to accompany and intercede for them. Mary’s faith and maternal love are continued in the Church.

“And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart”

(Lk. 2:19)

**JOURNEYING LIKE MARY**

This account of Mary’s pilgrimage of faith may assist us in our own pilgrimage. Mary’s faith was not directed to an abstract or distant God. The key to Mary’s faith was well expressed by Elizabeth: Mary was blessed because “she believed what was spoken to her would be fulfilled” (Lk. 1:45). It was to the word spoken to her that she was attentive. She listened attentively to the word in the Scripture, to the word and became anew his mother and our mother by pondering it and taking it into her heart. Thus she brought the word to its fulfillment through her love and the deeds of her life.

At every Eucharist, we hear God’s word. Following the example of Mary, may we listen attentively to the Word strengthening, nourishing and guiding our lives.

Thomas A. Thompson, S.M.
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The 2008 Synod of Bishops referred several times to the relation between the Word of God and the Virgin Mary. To “renew the Church’s faith,” said the bishops, “we look to the one in whom the interplay between the Word and the person was brought to perfection, that is, to the Virgin Mary “who by her ‘yes’ to the word of the covenant and her mission, perfectly fulfills the divine vocation of humanity.”

The synod suggested that the link between the Virgin Mary and the faith-filled hearing of the Word of God become more apparent, and that the relation between Marian studies and the Word of God be developed: “This could prove most beneficial both for the spiritual life and for theological and biblical studies.”

One way of illustrating and strengthening the relation between the Virgin Mary and the Word of God is the *Saint John’s Bible* in the Marian Library. Originally sponsored by Saint John’s Abbey (Collegeville, MN), the *Saint John’s Bible* continues the Benedictine monastic tradition of copying the biblical text with quill pens, in beautiful calligraphy, with intricate decoration of important words (illuminations), including contemporary scenes and sometimes the flora and fauna of changing seasons.

Saint John’s University had a notable collection of medieval manuscripts in the Hill Monastic Library and offered courses in calligraphy. So, when the possibility arose of producing a handwritten Bible with the services of Donald Jackson from Wales – the world’s foremost and the Queen’s calligrapher – it was an opportunity which the monks could not pass up.

The work took about fifteen years – seven in the planning and consultation, and about the same number in execution. Donald Jackson worked closely with the team of consultants from Saint John’s. The New Revised Standard Version was chosen because it is a sound translation, officially authorized for use by Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Eastern Orthodox churches.

*The Saint John’s Bible* is a modern manuscript (“written by hand”). It captures the spirit of the great medieval Bibles, yet it grows out of a contemporary artistic and theological sensitivity. Among the list of values established at the beginning of this project was the “desire to ignite the imagination, glorify God's word, foster the arts, and revive tradition.” Another purpose was to “give voice” to the excluded and underprivileged by highlighting passages that lift up the marginalized.

The history and the beauty of the volumes convey a message about the centrality of prayer in the monastic tradition and in the lives of religious people. The exquisite beauty of the calligraphy and the illustrations place the biblical message within a context of human achievement, aspiration, and identity.

The Marian Library has temporarily acquired two volumes of the *Saint John’s Bible* and hopes to acquire all seven volumes and to give it a permanent and prominent place. The image of Our Lady of the Marian Library will be included in the display case. This image, associated with the Marian Library since 1949, portrays the Virgin Mary, seated, with the open book of the Scripture on her lap. The image indicates Mary’s steadfast faith: she is the personification of faith – "Blest because she believed God's word to her would be fulfilled" (Lk. 1:45).

We invite your contributions and support for this project. ■

... we look to the one in whom the interplay between the Word and the person was brought to perfection, that is, to the Virgin Mary...
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