Meditation on 'Mary as Mother' – By Fiona

Opening words: This week, we have a transcript. We have attached some pictures/ resources to help you in your meditation. If you are meditating alone but would like to feel 'with us', we meditate at 7.30 pm on Wednesday in Wisdom Centre. The tradition we meditate in is Centring Prayer which is fully inclusive of all traditions of Christian Meditation and welcoming of World Traditions.

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centring Prayer Tradition: A very warm welcome from Fiona, Marie, Rob, Hazel and Paul, the leaders of the Christian Meditation group at Wisdom Centre, Romsey. The whole session is about 50 minutes. We meditate, beginning with an opening prayer followed by reflections and then 25 minutes of silence. We hope you enjoy your meditation with us.

Opening Prayer: *Eternal God,* through our meditation, may the ears of our hearts be attentive to your Word. May we seek and find You. Awakened to Your presence, may we be joyful, embodying peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-awareness. May we follow Your teaching, seeking also the Wisdom of the Holy Fathers and Mothers. May we, therefore, commit to community, love of earth, peace and justice-making. **Amen**

Reflections on 'Mary'

Introduction: This week, on the 15th of August, the wider Church celebrated the feast day of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In Mary, we are clearly dealing with a remarkable woman, although Mary was in many ways very ordinary; for instance, the Gospels attribute no miraculous works to her. In the Middle Ages, Mary was described as the 'seat of Wisdom,' an allusion to Woman Wisdom in Proverbs. In popular spirituality, Mary is often considered a symbol or 'Archetype' for Mother, inviting us to rediscover our own Motherhood, an attribute by no means exclusive to women, remembering that in Genesis 1:27 "Humankind was created as God's reflection: in the divine image God created them; female and male, God made them." Likewise, Isaiah 42:14 describes 'God-self' as a woman in labour. "I have kept myself still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labour, I will gasp and pant."

Standing at the foot of the cross, just before Jesus' death, were Jesus' mother, Mary and the two other Mary's. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." At that moment, Jesus' mother, Mary, became part of the household of the disciple (John 19:23-27). So, likewise, we imagine Mary cares for the beloved disciple, extending her Christian love.

In the Church, attention is most usually directed towards patriarchal images. But as we hear, Motherhood is most excellently exemplified in Mary, mother of Jesus. Although there is no contextual evidence within Scripture pointing to Jesus broadening Mary's role as "Archetypal mother" of all believers, we can see how the scene at the foot of the cross shows us the true model of Christian love. Pope Francis said the Church, modelled on Mary, "is a true mother who gives us life in Christ and, in the communion of the Holy Spirit, brings us into a common life with our brothers and sisters."[1]

As Pope Francis also said, Mary, is the road we must travel to reach Jesus. Jesus was conceived and shaped in Mary's womb. Mary said Pope Francis, "is not only the bridge joining us to God; she is much more. She is

[1] https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/30406/pope-francis-the-church-is-a-mother-who-guides-her-children

the road God travelled in order to reach us, and the road that we must travel in order to reach Him."[2] Mary's greatness lies in her willingness to continue to bring Jesus to the world. She doesn't draw attention to herself but to him.

So, Jesus came to us through Mary as a woman who found favour with God. In the Old Testament, God is believed to have 'opened the womb' of the Patriarchs' wives, bringing great Prophets from barren places. (Genesis 2931; 30:22), Ruth bore Obed, who begat Jesse. Jesus was descended from the line of Jesse and his Son David. (Isaiah 11:10), which shows how God has sought to use Motherhood to mediate salvation.

The Jewish Book of Proverbs maintains that the feminine figure of Holy Wisdom, Sophia, assisted God during the creation of the world which connects Wisdom with the first incarnation. Indeed, in the early Church, Wisdom was understood to be the "Logos," or Word of God. Additionally, Jewish rabbis equated the Torah, the law of God, with Wisdom; they found Woman wisdom was with God from the very beginning of time.

In the 4th Century, St. Augustine described Mary as 'the seat of Wisdom,' connecting Mary with the Jewish Wisdom tradition. Augustine declared, "God has decided to begin and accomplish his greatest works through the Blessed Virgin ever since he created her…God the Father gave his only Son to the world only through Mary…he gave his Son to Mary for the world to receive him from her." (St Augustine)



The idea of Mary as 'the seat of Wisdom' developed during the Middle Ages through the Benedictine tradition, via St. Bernard, Odo a Benedictine Abbot of Battle Abbey and St. Hildegard of Bingen a Benedictine Abbess, all of whom used Wisdom literature for developing Marian liturgies. Hildegard showed Mother Earth to us through the lens of Mother Mary and Mother Sophia… According to Hildegard, Mary spins earthly matter into being and weaves it together with the heavens so that all of creation is interpenetrated with the sacred. In Hildegard's theology, Mary merges with Sophia, Mother Wisdom, who dips one wing to earth while the other soars to heaven and, in her ecstatic flight, quickens life…

By the twelfth century: Wisdom as "a reflection of the eternal light, untarnished mirror of God 's active power, the image of his goodness." (Wisdom 7: 25-26) was applied directly to Mary based on supposed allusions to the Song of Mary, the Magnificat, which reads:

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name…
…he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate." (Luke:46-55)

[2] https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-01/pope-mary-is-the-road-we-must-travel-to-reach-jesus.html

By the time of the Catholic Revival in the 17th century, post Reformation, Wisdom literature was interpreted incarnationally, i.e. The 'seat of Wisdom' or throne as it is called in the Song of Mary was no longer associated with Mary but with Wisdom incarnate. We find a Wisdom description of Christ in Colossians: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; in him, all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him, all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the Church; he is the beginning…For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." (Colossians, 1: 15-18)

The founder of the Daughters of Wisdom, St Louis Marie de Montfort, said in his work, True devotion to Mary:

"God the Father imparted to Mary his fruitfulness as far as a mere creature was capable of receiving it, to enable her to bring forth his Son and all the members of his mystical body. (TD 14-17)

Jesus, our Saviour, true God and true man must be the ultimate end of all our other devotions; otherwise, they would be false and misleading. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end of everything." We labour", says St Paul ", only to make all people perfect in Jesus Christ." For in him alone dwells the entire fullness of the divinity and the complete fullness of grace, virtue and perfection. In him alone, we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing; he is the only teacher from whom we must learn; the only Lord on whom we should depend; the only Head to whom we should be united and the only model that we should imitate. He is the only Physician that can heal us; the only Shepherd that can feed us; the only way that can lead us; the only Truth that we can believe; the only Life that can animate us. He alone is everything to us, and he alone can satisfy all our desires…." (TD 61)

Many Protestants and Anglicans (my tradition) are suspicious of Roman Catholic writers who appear to present Mary as the feminine dimension of God; this is a misunderstanding. As Pope Francis and Louis Marie de Montfort make clear, the way to Jesus is through Mary, but only the Godhead can be the object of our devotions. While it is true that Marian images may appear to serve as compensation for the core male images of king, Lord, and Father, Mary is not an attribute of Christ or even God, but a 'way to.' However, Mary can be called 'the seat of Wisdom' as God created his most efficacious work through her, Jesus Christ, Wisdom incarnate.

So what can we learn from Mary today?

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul says that he will continue "in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you." In John 19:23-27 when Jesus says, Woman, here is your Son.' And then to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' We see Motherhood in an alternate setting. In this case, the disciple 'opens his home', and a new mother and son relationship is created. Symbiosis is a necessary element of all relationships. As Pope Francis said, "Mary is the road God travelled to reach us." Mary is perhaps an archetype of motherly hospitality, with the 'opened womb' also an 'open home,' a metaphor that invites us to consider how we receive people and how we ourselves are received as Mothers or caregivers. Remembering that Motherhood can take many forms, are we a road God can travel to reach others?

Beginning Meditation: Before beginning our meditation, you may wish to adjust your posture, you may wish to pay particular attention to the rhythm of your breath, taking a calming deep breath in through your nose and a slow breath out, letting go fully. Then repeat this a few times. If you have a sacred word, you might notice its rhythm, perhaps noticing how your Word is in time with the breath.

Bell Sounds…25-minute meditations begins…Count down timer starts (or use your own watch or meditation timer app) Bell Sounds…Meditation ends

Reflection after meditation

The Blessed Virgin Mary Compared to a Window by Thomas Merton

Because my will is simple as a window And knows no pride of original birth, It is my life to die, like glass, by light: Slain in the strong rays of the bridegroom sun. Because my love is simple as a window And knows no shame of original dust, I longed all night, (when I was visible) for dawn my death: When I would marry day, my Holy Spirit: And die by transubstantiation into light.	For light, my lover, steals my life in secret. I vanish into day, and leave no shadow But the geometry of my cross, Whose frame and structure are the strength By which I die, but only to the earth, And am uplifted to the sky my life. When I became the substance of my lover, (Being obedient, sinless glass) I love all things that need my lover's life, And live to give my newborn Morning to your quiet rooms…

Closing prayer: Loving and Eternal God, we thank you for the gifts of prayer, meditation and contemplation. We thank you for being with us and for this community. May we, therefore, pray with all others, as one community, one world and one spirit to One God…Moments of your personal prayer follow…**Amen**

Thank you for meditating with us. Please join us again soon.

Resources:

For meditation groups, prayer groups, spirituality, wellbeing, retreats, workshops and our labyrinth garden, please visit our website: **wisdomhouseromsey.co.uk**



Our peaceful outdoor spaces promote wellbeing and are open to all, free of charge.