

Triduum of Our Lady of Mount Carmel

Spiritual Conferences and Homily upon Our Lady, Fountain of Salvation

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Introduction

The Carmel of Mary Immaculate and St Mary Magdalen in Flemington, New Jersey, invited me to preside over their Triduum of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in 2023. This *Triduum* is a series of three preached Holy Hours (July 13, 14, and 15 that year) in preparation of the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel on July 16 (a Sunday that year). Since that year was during the national Eucharistic Revival, I centered my conferences upon our Lady and the Eucharist. The readings from Scripture came from *Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Vol. 2* “31. The Blessed Virgin marry, Fountain of Salvation.” I also celebrated the Mass for the Solemnity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel for the Carmelite nuns. The readings for that Mass were 1 Kings 18:42b–4 5a, Psalm 14:1, 2-3, 4, Galatians 4:4–7, and John 19:25–27.

Below are the conferences and homily given during these celebrations compiled together in a single place. They are as I had for my notes to preach from, with some editorial corrections. As naturally occurs though, those who were present received a conference which does not match one hundred percent to the text below.

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Conference 1: Ezechiel 47:1-2, 8-9, 12

Introduction

At the very beginning I would like to extend a word of gratitude to Mother Mary Elizabeth² and the dear sisters here for the honor of preaching this Triduum in honor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. I also thank Sr. Mary Benedicta for her help in answering my questions and supplying me with the details for these evenings.

As I began to prepare for these three evenings, my initial thought was to reflect upon Mary and the Eucharist, since we are in this period of Eucharistic revival. With that in mind, I went looking for readings in the lectionary of the collection of Marian Masses; my hope was to find a Mass entitled something like: Mary, Mother of the Eucharist. Alas, I did not find that. But, the thirty-first Marian Mass, within a series of Masses for Ordinary Time, was quite fitting.

Our readings for this triduum come from the Mass entitled: The Blessed Virgin Mary, Fountain of Salvation. And so we will begin our reflections here on how fitting of a title this is for our theme. In *Lumen Gentium* 11 we read, “taking part in the eucharistic sacrifice, the source and summit of the Christian life, [the assembled faithful] offer the divine victim to God and themselves along with it.” In Latin, the word for source is *fons* and so more literally translated *fountain*. The Eucharist is the Fountain of the Christian Life, and in our Mass the Church has named Mary as the Fountain of Salvation.

But even further, when we turn to scripture the word fountain, in the Greek is *pege*, occurs only eleven times in the New Testament, seven of which are in writings by the Apostle John (two in the Gospel, and five in Revelation). We will unpack this as we go, but this notion of fountains will be an important theme in our reflections.

One final preliminary note on fountains is that the best ones are constantly flowing. Interestingly, this Mass would thematically fit in Lent or Easter, and yet the Church places the only Mass linking the notion of a fountain and Mary by name in Ordinary Time. This is most likely coincidence, but in providence there is a correspondence. Ordinary time is *ordered* or *directed* time, time flowing from the singular and historical Paschal Event in the Sacred Triduum to the glorious return of our Lord at the end of time. Meaning, we live *in ordinary time*, while at times we reflect more intentionally about parts of the Mysteries of Christ throughout the liturgical year.

The one singular and eternal font from calvary gives forth the *waters of eternal life* to this day until the summit of the general resurrection. And so to reflect upon our blessed Mother as the fountain of salvation in Ordinary Time is most fitting, since it reminds us that this font is for us to go to during our pilgrim journey now, not a retreat to the past, nor a future longing; but instead it is an eternal fountain in the present. The lush oasis in the desert of life on the journey to paradise.

² In humility I must note that I got the name of mother wrong during the talk, and incorrectly called her Mother Anne.

Background

With this general background, let us turn towards our reading this evening from the prophet Ezekiel. As a prophet Ezekiel was gifted with grand and vivid experiences of the LORD and this comes through in his prophecies, as we heard in our reading. His imagery this evening also calls to mind that of Revelation and so the Garden of Paradise.

Our prophetic vision of interest comes at the start in chapter forty-seven (of forty-eight chapters) in the third section of his book. The first two sections consist of warnings and calls to repentance for the people of Judah and other nations. In this last section though, there are several prophecies focused upon the renewal of the whole people of Israel and the future blessings by the LORD. Just before our reading in chapter forty-six the Lord was outlining the proper restoration of temple worship, and then the second half of forty-seven and chapter forty-eight deals with land distribution and the refoundation of people of Israel. This context is important since our vision then serves as the bridge or turning point between worship and *political* restoration.

We must remember that the people were ultimately driven from the land on account of their idolatry. Yes, they had many other sins, but it was the sin of idolatry which finally drew to a close the Lord's merciful forbearance. Ezechiel's prophecy first is saying that before the people can be resettled, before they can receive the Lord's blessing once more, they must be cleansed of their idolatry and return to right worship (the true meaning of *orthodoxy*). Only then will the Lord restore them to everything else. All the blessings of the covenant flow from worship of God, and for those who worship God in truth, the blessings are but just further gifts from the Lord.

Commentary

And so "the angle brought [Ezekiel] back to the entrance of the temple of the LORD, and [he] saw water flowing out from beneath the threshold of the temple toward the east, ... the water flowed down from ... the [southern side] of the altar."

There are a lot of interesting small details here. First, from whence is the water flowing? What is the source of the font? In truth, we actually do not know; Ezekiel simply sees the water flowing from the other side of the altar on the south side of the altar. From the layout of the temple in this period we can reconstruct a little bit though to help us out. The main altar in the temple stood in front of the Holy of Holies and faced the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies itself was situated in the western side of the temple and opened to the east. This means that the water was flowing from the west, on the left-hand side of the altar, and from the direction of the Holy of Holies, but we can go nothing further.

A second interesting small details is that this water flowing along the altar is clean and clear water. And why would it not be? We are so accustomed to the unbloody sacrifice of the Eucharist that we can forget that the sacrifices in this temple were bloody. In practical terms the temple functioned much like a butcher shop or slaughterhouse. This vision seems to be happening during the day which means many sacrifices would have been offered at this point, and a

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component of sacrifice was pouring blood upon and around the altar. Under normal working conditions, it would be impossible for water to flow along the ground without comingling with blood and gore.

And here we can pause for a moment. Earlier in Ezekiel we read, “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”³ From the beating heart of the temple, the Holy of Holies, this pure water flows, which cleanses the temple of its grime. This water, instead of becoming contaminated by the idolatrous filth within the temple of the heart, cleanses and restores the heart.

For this reason, the water flows past the altar from the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies is God’s presence in the midst of his temple, which is itself in the midst of his people. The altar then represents our response of praise and sacrifice to God’s presence. And so in Psalm 51 we hear, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me,”⁴ and David continues by linking the heart to sacrifice, “For you take no delight in sacrifice;” that is in bloody sacrifices, “were I to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”⁵

And so the heart is the true altar of sacrifice, the altar within, and as Ezekiel sees the water flowing from the heart of the Holy of Holies, and it purifies the altar; and so too he sees our hearts being purified, that we might offer true worship and sacrifice once more, no longer bloodied, but in humble truth and purity.

Notice further this interplay between the blood and water, stoney heart and living heart, death and life. For as St. Paul says *the Old Law only increased condemnation*⁶ and with-it death in response to our sin, while *in the Spirit of Christ we now receive life*⁷ under the New Law. For it is through death that new life springs forth.⁸

Zooming out, we find the temple complex sitting within Jerusalem as the heart of the city, and into the east the water continues to trickle. And here we can find a Marian image. Safely from within the temple, the font of salvation flows, but it is the temple as a whole which mediates this stream. Our blessed Mother, at the annunciation becomes the living temple, the living place of encounter with the Lord. This is why Elizabeth rejoices at the visitation. The source of salvation came forth from Mary, who first received the word of God in her heart, which was made perfectly pure by the dew of the Spirit at her own conception. She could hold the Holy of Holies within, for

³ Ez 36:25–26.

⁴ Ps 51:10.

⁵ Ps 51:16–17.

⁶ Cf. Rm 5:20.

⁷ Cf. Cf. Rm 5:21, 8:1-2,11.

⁸ Cf. John 12:24.

as the stream of God's grace flowed forth, the altar of her heart had no impurities, but instead stood before her son in humble praise and worship. In due time, just as the water in Ezekiel made its way forth and through the city, so too would Mary bring forth Christ to the *city*, which is the heavenly Jerusalem, the Church.

Returning once more to the source of water, notice its humble origins. It is but a trickle of water. And what simple origins did our Lord have, though most pure, he arrived in humble circumstances. But we will see, the trickle grows and expands, just as Christ *grew in wisdom* under Mary and Joseph as he returned with them from the temple.

Then, "the angle led [Ezekiel] outside ... and around to the outer gate facing the east."

Standing here, around the year 570 BC, the prophet would see the lush western slopes of the hills around Jerusalem sitting in stark contrast to the arid hills and jagged canyons to the east. Here, the heart of the people sits between death and life, blessing and curse. Here, this new water flows from the beating heart of the people into the arid east beyond the walls of the city.

The Garden of Eden is called a *paradise*. This word has a specific meaning in this cultural context, it does not simply mean any garden. A *paradise* is a walled royal garden. And we see this in creation, since Adam and Eve are placed in the LORD's garden (and so it is royal), and when they are expelled, an angel is set at the eastern entrance of the garden since it was walled. What good would stationing a guard in the east be if one could enter anywhere after all? From this original garden flowed on river which split into four rivers beyond the garden with the purpose of watering the garden and the lands beyond. Milton in *Paradise Lost* imagines that the purpose of our original parents (at first) was to expand the garden to encompass the entire world.

Returning to Ezekiel we find this stark contrast then, a walled city, Jerusalem, which was thought to be close to Eden, sitting between the verdant and arid. Now a new river, a fifth river, flows out of the gates and into the east, and this river brings life to everything which it meets. It brings life where death was wrought by Adam and Eve's expulsion. It completes their mandate.

The geographic descriptions indicate that this stream flows east to the Jordan River and then into the Dead sea. The verses which are excluded from our reading make it clear that as this font of water goes forth it becomes ever deeper and wider as it brings life wherever it goes. The Garden of Eden returns once more as it overflows with abundance into the east. The Lord is completing creation, that is, he is bringing about a new creation. In this new garden the people will be restored to peace, restored to communion, and restored to right relationship or justice with the Lord.

This restoration is made possible by the font of grace which flows from the Holy of Holies and ends embracing the world, overcoming even the most arid and inhospitable lands. And here we will come to rest beside these waters of salvation and allow our hearts to drink from this stream of delight, in the hope that it might make them living, beating hearts. May our hearts steep in these waters and be soothed by the healing leaves around us. Amen.

Conference 2: Isaiah 12:2-3, 4bcd, 5-6

Introduction

Yesterday evening we left off resting along the river of salvation, in the new Garden of Eden. This river flows from the Holy of Holies and makes pure all those hearts which seek to worship God rightly.

The notions of fountains and water were essential to our reflection yesterday, and they will continue with us throughout our evening tonight. We should also recall that our overall theme is Mary as the Fountain of Salvation and her relationship with the Eucharist.

This evening our reading comes from the Psalm for our framing Mass, and we must note immediately that it is not in fact from the Book of Psalms but is instead a hymn of praise from the Prophet Isaiah. *Psalm* as a word simply indicates a hymn of praise and is closely related to the word prayer. This then provides context to this hymn; it is not any hymn in general or any hymn of thanksgiving, but it is an act of prayer.

But first, the man Isaiah. He was a prophet as we well know, active in Jerusalem during the 8th C BC. This places a whole century between him and Ezekiel, who was active during the 6th C BC. Isaiah was also present for much of the political turmoil during the Assyrian wars that preceded the Babylonian exile. Ezekiel then was active on the other side of this period, in the exile itself.

The Book of Isaiah is divided into three sections based upon the three different major themes of prophecy contained in these sections. Our hymn comes from first Isaiah, which contains prophecies concerning Judah before the exile. Within this major section, it comes at the end of a series of prophecies against Jerusalem and Judah, and closes the first section of first Isaiah. Like our reading yesterday from Ezekiel, our hymn comes after condemnation and ends with restoration.

Thematically it is close in theme to the Hymn of Thanksgiving of Moses and Miriam in Exodus 15 and Psalm 118. The Hymn of Moses and Miriam was sung upon the banks of the Red Sea, just after the Lord had covered the Egyptian army with the waters of the sea. These waters are taken up often as a foreshadow of baptism, which is the entrance to the Eucharist; and so this too becomes linked to the waters flowing from the temple of Ezekiel for our reflection.

But now, one final note on the role of the psalm in the readings for a Mass. To sing a hymn of praise while worshiping the Lord is laudable, but how do we pick a particular hymn among all available? Even restricted to the Psalms and other inspired hymns in scripture, we have many to choose from. How do we decide a particular one?

Quite often the Psalm will be linked in theme to the central theme of the first reading, and we find that this evening immediately with the idea of the flowing river in Ezekial and *drawing water at the fountain of salvation* in our psalm. This then brings out the second aspect of the psalm

in the Mass; it often is the personal response of one to the first reading. In Ezekiel we stood as an observer along the stream but did not interact with it. Now in the psalm we become one who *draws water* from the stream, the first reading becomes personal as we step into it. And so, having spent the night in rest and contemplation beneath the consoling branches along the banks of the river, having allowed our hearts to soak in this stream, let us learn now from Isaiah how to open our lips in praise, and worship the Lord in our newly made hearts.

Refrain

The refrain for our hymn is, “You will draw water joyfully from the springs of salvation.” This gives the primary background for each of the three verses, and we find clear parallels to the first reading. The river gave life and salvation to all it touched. The river cleansed the temple, flowing pure and clean, which produced the conditions for the people of Israel to enter into salvation from exile. All that remains is for them to come to this fountain of Salvation and drink from it.

So too for us, we must personally move towards the font. As Psalm 23 says, “You prepare a table before me,”⁹ and our Lord says in Matthew, “Go therefore to the streets, and invite to the marriage feast as many as you find.”¹⁰ All is prepared, and we invited in to receive from the Lord. Isaiah too cries in prophecy, “Oh, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.”¹¹ It is now for us to come and draw water.

But how will we do so? How will we come to draw water and sit at this table? We will come forward to do so with a joyful disposition. It is a time of rejoicing to receive these waters. We must not be crushed by our guilt in needing these waters of salvation, for the moment of restoration is here, the Bridegroom of our souls has arrived and so as Nehemiah says, “[we must not] be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is [our] strength.”¹² We have come to the place where the Seer of Revelation says, “[The Lord] will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away,”¹³ for the LORD has *made all things news*.¹⁴

This answers the disposition by which we ought to draw from the font of Salvation, but by what means shall we draw? Where is our bucket, where is the well? And here there are two means to draw from these waters, and one we saw previously. These waters flow from the Holy of Holies, past the altar, out of the temple, through the City, and into the East. Yesterday we noted that we can see the temple as an icon of Mary, who in her purity held within her womb the true Holy of Holies, and from her came this spring of salvation. Now then we must go to her and ask her to

⁹ Ps 23:5.

¹⁰ Mt 22:9.

¹¹ Is 55:1.

¹² Neh 8:10.

¹³ Rev 21:4.

¹⁴ Cf. Rev 21:5.

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teach us how to draw water from this spring. She, as in the wedding of Cana, cannot but run to our Lord on our behalf, that he might prepare an abundance of our saving drink.¹⁵ She will bring us to this font and teach us how to not just receive in our bodies this water, but how this water might purify our hearts, like unto hers, so that we too might have a pure and spotless altar within to worship joyfully the Lord.

But concretely, what is it our Lady bring us to? What is the physical object of salvation from which we will drink at our Lady's instruction? The Source of the Christian life, the font of Salvation, the Body and Blood of Our Lord in the Eucharist. This is our constant refrain, our constant recourse, our *viaticum* during this pilgrim journey. As we come to this Oasis to drink joyfully, our Lady meets us there to rejoice in our joy.

Verse One

And so we say in the first verse, "God indeed is my savior; I am confident and unafraid. My strength and my courage is the Lord, and he has been my savior."

In this first verse we begin by acknowledging God as savior. This presupposes that we see ourselves in need of being saved, and that we have confidence that God can save us. No one will say, "I am perfect," we all recognize that we have weaknesses, but do we know the difference between sin and weakness? Do we truly believe that we are unable to overcome sin and certain weaknesses by human effort? So long as we hold in the depth of our hearts that salvation is in theory possible by our efforts, we limit God's ability to save us.

The people shortly after the death of Isaiah would be sent into exile. This would be so because they trusted in their strength, in the strength of idols, and men. Isaiah himself warned the people saying, "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the LORD!"¹⁶

Instead we joyfully proclaim that *our strength and our courage is the Lord*. Note though that the psalm continues to say, "and he has been my savior," meaning we can only sing this verse in truth if we recognize that God has already been our savior. Now all of us, though our baptism, have experienced God's salvation. Every time we participate in the most Holy Eucharist, we experience God's salvation. God has been our savior, but do we recognize that he has saved us?

But for those who do recognize that the Lord has saved them, they continue in saying, "with joy you will draw water at the fountain of salvation." If we can point to concrete experiences of God's salvation and liberation from sin in our lives, then how can we not joyfully draw water from the fountain of salvation. To do so in any other way or disposition would be to deny our

¹⁵ Cf. Jn 2:1-12.

¹⁶ Is 31:1.

experience and to deny God's gift to us. It would be the utmost expression of ingratitude, and so an inversion of what the very word Eucharist means, thanksgiving.

Verse Two

And so the hymn continues in the second verse, "Give thanks to the Lord, acclaim his name;" Having drank from the font of salvation, and remembered the good things which the Lord has done for us, we now turn to praise and worship him. As the first verse aligned with the first commandment, *you shall have only one God*, this second verse aligns with the second commandment, *you shall not take the name of the Lord in vain*. We often think of this in the context of oaths and swearing, and rightly so; however, notice in this context, we are acclaiming the Lord's name having recognized him as *savior* first.

If we do not see the Lord as our strength, as our savior, as our God, we are literally *taking the Lord's name in vain* when we worship him, since his name is emptied of meaning (for vain simply means empty). Instead our worship becomes performative and mere ceremonies. Isaiah himself also prophesied against Israel for this same behavior saying, "declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins. They seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness.¹⁷ ... Take away from the midst of you the yoke, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, ... [then] the Lord will guide you continually, ... and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.¹⁸ Call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the Lord.¹⁹"

Beyond personally acknowledging the saving action of God in our lives, we are to make these deeds known to the nation as the hymn continues, "among the nations make known his deeds, proclaim how exalted is his name."

Israel was to be a holy nation, a nation of priests.²⁰ They were supposed to make known the great deeds of the Lord but failed in this mission when they fell into idolatry. They hid the Lord's might by seeking the might of men. In turn, they became an obstacle to the peoples of the world, preventing them from hearing the words of salvation and so forestalling the restoration of humanity after the fall. And so they will now be sent into exile so that all nations will finally hear the glory of God's name.

Now certainly the people were troubled by being set apart. They did not like appearing *different*. We are much like them in this regard. Mary too is troubled on hearing of the deed which the Lord will work through her. She though, as the true daughter of Israel, the true Eve, gives the

¹⁷ Is 58:1-2.

¹⁸ Is 58:9-11.

¹⁹ Is 58:13-14.

²⁰ Cf. Ex 19:5-6.

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model to the Church of how to respond. Mary received her message from the angel Gabriel, and then went forth to her cousin and rejoiced saying, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my savior, for he has done great things for me and holy is his name.”²¹ She did not hide in her calling, she did not try to reduce or minimize it, but instead rejoiced sharing the Good News of salvation.

Verse Three

And so in verse three we continue with Mary in the Oasis, “Sing praise to the Lord for his glorious achievement; let this be known throughout all the earth.”

This is worship in its most pure form. To do so we must recognize the Lord’s glorious achievements. Our Lady could only praise the Lord in the Magnificat because *she kept all these things in her heart*²² and *meditated upon them day and night*.²³ As a result she could *discern the movements of the Spirit*²⁴ and so clearly articulated the glorious deeds of the Lord. So too must we do. We must spend sufficient time in silent contemplation, where *cor ad cor loquitur*, where heart speaks to heart, the heart of God with the altar of our heart within the temple of our souls.

But once we have found the living God within this hidden mansion and drink from the spiring of salvation therein, we, like Mary, will be unable to not “Shout with exultation, O city of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.” We have found ourselves in a lush garden. Our beloved is truly in our midst. His handmaiden has welcomed us and instructed us by her most chaste actions on how to adore him. Come let us adore him, let us open our souls to him that we might drink of his delight.²⁵ May the Immaculate Heart of Mary teach us to worship Christ in purity and truth. Amen.

²¹ Lk 1:46–47, 49.

²² Cf. Lk 2:19, 51.

²³ Cf. Ps 1:2.

²⁴ Cf. Lk 12:54–56, Mt 16:1–3, and Jn 3:8.

²⁵ Cf. Song 5:1–6.

Conference 3: John 19:25-37

Introduction

Having rested alongside the waters of salvation and after seeking the guidance of our Lady as how to drink from this stream, this evening we turn once more to the source of this stream. The last two evenings we have been in the realm of prophecy and foreshadows, types which awaited their fulfillment in the coming Messiah. The spring and torrent anticipated, but not yet arrived. This evening we will gaze upon the font of Salvation itself, the fulfillment and actualization of what we have longed for.

Background

We have already noted some similarities between John's writings and Ezekiel's vision, their garden imagery and well imagery. Though John uses neither explicitly in our Gospel reading, the context and actions certainly indicate both realities. We also find a clear parallel between Ezekiel's vision of the temple and Christ's crucifixion.

Christ upon the cross was situated to the east of the temple, and on a hill above the temple. This means that he faced to the west, looking down upon the eastern gate of the temple towards the Holy of Holies. Ezekiel, who is a priest himself, experiences his vision from a similar perspective, almost always from the east looking west. Also as we noted, the altar of sacrifice stood in front of the Holy of Holies, and the priest stood on the eastern side and offered the sacrifices towards the Holy of Holies in the west. Christ too, as the high priest,²⁶ offers his sacrifice to the Father²⁷ in the east facing the icon of the Father's presence in the temple to the west.

John notes that Christ died during the sacrifice of the lambs in preparation for the Passover meal.²⁸ Now, the blood of the lamb in the original Passover redeemed the people of Israel from slavery and spared them from the curse of the angel of death.²⁹ It was meant in part to purify the people from the contamination of Egyptian practices during their time in Egypt by separating them from the people around them. For Jews afterwards, the blood of the lamb indicated their continued commitment to the Lord and his covenant, that they would be his people, a royal and priestly people. It ought to have been a period of purifying the people's hearts as they were renewed in the covenant.

From history and our own personal experience, we know the challenges of living up to the reality of God's calling in this world and remaining spotless and pure. For this reason then we find Christ upon the cross at the time when the Passover lambs were sacrificed. For as the Letter to the Hebrews states, "under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things

²⁶ Cf. Heb 4:14.

²⁷ Cf. Heb 10:10, 12, 14.

²⁸ See also Lk 22:44.

²⁹ Cf. Ex 12:9, 23, 27.

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to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.”³⁰ And so John says in his first letter that by “the blood of Jesus, his Son cleanses us from all sin.”³¹ Christ’s blood bring true purification.

This should bring immediately to mind the water from Ezekiel which cleanses the heart, turning it from a stony heart into a heart of flesh, and which Psalm 51 says offers proper sacrifice to the Lord.

Commentary

Coming now to our Gospel this evening, we find the women who have faithfully accompanied the Lord throughout his ministry and the beloved disciple around the cross. Christ looks down and “saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, and said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother.’ And from the hour the disciple took her into his home.” What drama and what tenderness. In Christ’s final moments he provides for his mother. What simple and striking words, “Woman, behold, you son.” To our modern ears we can hear the word *woman* as a reduction of Mary’s individuality to simply her gender. Yet, nothing could be farther from the truth, as in this designation she is identified with the first woman. In this moment, the New Adam is ushering in the New Creation, he is laying down his life for his bride as the first Adam ought to have done. And as the first Adam recognized Eve first as woman,³² so too Mary is named woman as the New Eve. In doing so she becomes the mother of *all the living*³³ in the new creation.

Christ then continues in saying *behold your son*. Naturally, as Christ called out to his mother, she instinctually looked up to her son. At his voice she truly beheld her son, the God-Man. The prophecies she had heard and pondered in her heart were being fulfilled in her sight. With the eyes of her most pure heart, what did she see as she gazed upon her son?

While pondering her firstborn she sees him turn to another, one standing just to her side and hears, “Behold, your mother.” He does not give a name or title in the way he did with his mother. His eyes gaze upon the beloved disciple, and as a mother who has followed her son’s eyes since an infant, she knows upon whom he looks now without having to avert her gaze. And here we have a triangle created, as the disciple looks upon Mary, who looks upon her Son, who looks upon the disciple. Is this not how our Lady intercedes constantly? Is this not the icon of Mary’s role in mediation? As the font of salvation came from her, now she is entrusted with the disciple to continue leading him to this singular source.

How does the disciple react? He was already standing close to our Lady, and now he *took her into his home*. What wisdom and mysteries he must have learned from her? What a blessed

³⁰ Heb 9:22–23.

³¹ 1 Jn 1:7.

³² Cf. Gen 2:23.

³³ Cf. Gen 3:20.

model we have been given. In spiritual studies it is no coincidence that John and Mary are so often associated. It is true that Mary is the definitive model of the Christian life. But for those who strive to come to her and seek to conform themselves to her model, John is given as the exemplar. Just as Mary pondered her experiences in the inner room of her heart, so too John welcomed her into his home that she might teach him how to meditate on the mysteries of Christ. How simple and yet how hard!

Christ then speaks once more in another terse sentence, “I thirst.” As we are called to drink from the stream, we now hear the stream itself cry out, “I thirst!” He thirsts for us to drink from him, from his stream. And then he offers up his spirit. A soldier with a lance comes and pierces the side of our Lord, and water and blood flows forth.

Medically, we know that the trauma induced by crucifixion would cause fluid to collect around the heart. And so by the presence of both blood and water, we see the soldier piercing the heart of the Lord, that is the Holy of Holies within the temple of Christ’s own body. His very sanctuary is torn in two as is witnessed in the tearing of the temple curtain in the Synoptic Gospels at the same moment.³⁴ From this true Holy of Holies the stream of salvation begins to flow, from the heart of Christ. It flows out of his body and into the literal arid land to the east outside of Jerusalem.

Which side was pierced, scripture does not say. Pious tradition says that the soldier pierced the right side of the Lord, which would have caused this font to flow to the north side of the altar of the cross. If the soldier had pierced Christ from the left side, which is also closer to the heart, then the font would have flowed to the south.

Whichever side, the font of salvation flows and we immediately see the restoration of those whom this water touches. In Luke, the centurion confesses Christ’s innocence, and the onlookers are humbled in heart and contrite.³⁵ In Matthew, the centurion goes even further and prophesies Christ to be the Son of God while many are raised from the dead and enter into the city.³⁶ The new creation, the reconciliation of humanity has begun. Jew and gentile are saved, the dead are raised, the desert gives forth life.

“An eyewitness has testified, and his testimony if true; he knows that he is speaking the truth, so that you also may come to believe.” And as St. Paul says in Romans, “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.”³⁷ This is the message of salvation, it is the message of Christ, it is the Good News. The seer John has witnessed it himself. He has stood at the source of the font of salvation. He has seen, like Ezekiel, the wastelands give forth life at the touch of this water. The beloved disciple proclaims to us the way to these waters,

³⁴ Cf. Lk 23:45–46, and Mt 27:50–51.

³⁵ Cf. Lk 23:47–48, Ps 51:16–17.

³⁶ Cf. Mt 27:52–54.

³⁷ Rm 10:17.

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as one crying out in the desert,³⁸ inviting us to the waters of salvation. His voice rings throughout the world alongside those who have drunk from these waters.³⁹ They beckon us to an expending Oasis, a lush garden growing from a stream of water. As we come to the eastern gate into this place, we are greeted by a woman, the handmaiden of the Master of the garden. She guides us through this verdant pasture⁴⁰ deeper towards its heart. And there we find a tree,⁴¹ ruddy in places but in full bloom. Our Lady tells us how its leaves give healing all year round, and its fruit never fails. As we see this tree, ever ancient, ever new, our eyes see a small spring flowing forth from its roots. Through the earth is mixed with clay, the water goes forth crisp and clear.

The woman invites us to rest beneath the tree and listen to the gentle stream as the cooling afternoon breeze moves through the garden.⁴² After some time, the thirst from our journey swells up, and our guide invites us to come and drink. As we kneel to draw water from the stream, it is as if the stream itself rises up to meet us, as if it desires to satiate our thirst. As we drink, we hear, “the water that I have given you will become in you a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”⁴³ In tranquility we return to our place beneath the tree. As we ponder these words, the woman knowingly waits. In time we ask her, what does it mean? “My child, these are the waters of eternal life, as often as you drink from them and eat of the fruits of this tree, you proclaim and participate in the salvation of the Lord.⁴⁴ Rest with me for a while, and I will teach you how to contemplate these things. Eat and drink, and my Son will make you strong; and he will free you from your previous burdens.⁴⁵ Rest my child, for the wedding feast has just begun.⁴⁶”

³⁸ Cf. Is 40:3–8, John 1:23.

³⁹ Cf. Ps 19:4, Rm 10:18.

⁴⁰ Cf. Ps 23:2–3.

⁴¹ Cf. Gen 2:9.

⁴² Cf. Gen 3:8.

⁴³ Cf. Jn 4:14.

⁴⁴ Cf. 1 Cor 11:26.

⁴⁵ Cf. Mt 11:28–30.

⁴⁶ Cf. Rev 19:6–9.

Homily for the Solemnity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel

The great prophet Elijah, after slaying the prophets of Ba'al in front of King Ahab then prays to the Lord God, and he certainly does to in an odd way. He climbs to the top of Carmel and ... says nothing! How weird! Just previously, when offering sacrifice to the Lord he prayed aloud. Prayer throughout scripture is expressed aloud. Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, is one of first people whom we know for a fact prayed without speaking, but instead poured out her soul before the Lord.⁴⁷ This was so odd at the time that the high priest Eli thought that she was drunk.⁴⁸ But she was not, and the Lord heard her plea for she offered true sacrifice upon a contrite and humble heart.⁴⁹

Here too the great prophet bows down into the dirt, no longer raising his hands in triumph, glorying in the Lord's majesty. He humbles himself as one made from the dirt praying within his heart. How long was he in meditation before the Lord? What transpired between hearts? We do not know, but we do know that into this contemplation the Lord suddenly spoke and moved the prophet to send his servant to be on the look out.

So too the Lord comes to us, after extended periods of contemplation, in humble disposition before the Lord, in his perfect freedom he surprises our souls, for we know not the hour when the bridegroom will arrive.⁵⁰ But when he does, we must act with joyful haste at the appearance of our expected beloved.

Often too, when we hear his voice after so long it sounds confusing, "Why are we looking towards the sea? What are we to see?" But we must look; for something must arrive. And so the servant is directed to go back seven times while Elijah continues in prayer. We have heard the voice of the Lord echo in our souls, and our spirits now long to hear him clearly. We return to our outpost once, twice, thrice, seven times more. Our longing for him increases as we remain in silence, any disturbance is torture for it may cause us to not hear when he speaks again.

Then, there it is, a sound once more, the cloud from the sea has arisen. He comes now our beloved, and before we can react, the storm is upon us. After the long-expected arrival, the Lord overwhelms our souls.

And yet, is not this drawn out process the source of our impertinence? Why can he not speak clearly, and always? How impatient are we at times, particularly once we have caught a whiff of our Lord's lovely sent?

What must have sat in Mary's heart those three and thirty years of our Lord's life? She heard those prophecies in the temple upon his presentation. What of this rise and fall of many?

⁴⁷ Cf. 1 Sam 1:9–18.

⁴⁸ Cf. 1 Sam 1:14.

⁴⁹ Cf. 1 Sam 1:17–20, Ps 51:16–17.

⁵⁰ Cf. Mt 25:1–13.

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What of this sword which will pierce her heart?⁵¹ How must her expectation and longing have grown even as her intimacy with her son deepened.

Only at the end of Christ's life could the answers come in the overcast evening of our Lord's death, when the rain of grace poured forth. As one mystery given in contemplation was expounded, another mystery was poured in her heart. This is not the end, but what happens now? As her Son rose once more, she enjoyed the catharsis of contemplative comprehension after decades of seeking. How mysterious and unexpected, how confusing and delightful.

As she entered the home of John, and raised the early Church what did the eyes of her soul see? As John celebrated Mass for her and her new children, what exchange between her and her Son must have happened in the reception of the Eucharist?

The Lord will speak to Elijah shortly, in the midst of storms, earthquakes, and fires. When he speaks, he will do so in a whisper.⁵² Might we all, through the example and guidance of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, persevere in attentive contemplation, patiently awaiting the Lord's arrival with ever greater love, so that when he does arrive, we might drink fully of his abundant delight in the eternal wedding banquet.⁵³ Amen.

⁵¹ Cf. Lk 2:34–35

⁵² Cf. 1 Kings 19:11–13.

⁵³ Cf. Rev 19:6–9.