

“ Mary... Do not Hold on to Me Go and tell them...” (John; 20:16-17)

Today, let us reflect on the women who accompanied Jesus from his conception to the resurrection and ascension into heaven (Paschal mystery).

Mary, the mother of Jesus’ ‘Yes’ in response to the angel’s message announcing Jesus birth as the Messiah, *“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word”* (Luke; 1:38), is the beginning of God’s greatest act of love to us all, God’s creation. She not only accepts to be the Mother of God; but, also to be a key person in Jesus’ Paschal mystery.

Equally, the famous Art and tradition, the *Pietà*, depicts Mary, in sorrow, but lovingly, in her arms holding the lifeless body of her Son who is now broken, wounded, bruised; just as she held Him when he was a baby, wrapped in swaddling cloths in the manger in Bethlehem, because there was no room in the inn. Yet, she ponders all this in her heart.

The other woman is **Elizabeth**, Mary’s cousin. As they meet, the child in her womb, John the Baptist, the one who was chosen to prepare Jesus’ way, leaps for joy. God uses these two women to fulfil the promise of redemption for us all. Furthermore, throughout the Gospels we encounter great women who walk closely or ‘at a distance’ with Jesus.

For instance, **Mary Magdalene**, anoints Jesus’s feet with oil and dry them with her hair, and is not afraid what those in the room think or say about her (Luke 7:36-50). Other women, such as, Susanna, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza support Jesus in His ministry as He preaches, heals the sick and does good to all, especially the poor.

Similarly, in fidelity, with courage and compassion, **we witness women accompanying Jesus in his most agonising journey to Calvary**. Here they witness first hand, Jesus, dejected, humiliated, brutalised, nailed on the cross beside two criminals and buried in a borrowed grave. The women also were keen to know where the grave was. No wonder, Mary Magdalene, was the first to encounter Jesus personally at the tomb. He commissions her to go and tell the others what she had seen.

On the other hand, Veronica’s nonviolent action of wiping Jesus face which is full of blood and sweat, in the presence of the soldiers who are violently pushing Jesus and roughly raising him once he falls, invite us to address violence with love in action. What also can we learn from the ‘Daughters of Jerusalem’ who wail and weep as they see the ‘disfigured, agonised and gentle face of the one that once protected them against the crowd of men (John 8:1-11); raised their dead son (Luke 7:11-17); ‘caressed and asked that their children would come to him’ (Matthew 19:14); spend time with them even when the disciples are shocked by this gesture (John 4:1-42)?

This display of emotions of the women call us out to unmask our indifference, to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep, to be attentive to the suffering of others, speak out for the vulnerable and call ‘injustice out by its name’ and to reach out to the wounded, the brutalised and condemned men and women in our world. By following Jesus, they, like Mary, are saying ‘Yes’ to collaboration in the redemptive work of God.

More so, in the witness of these women who walk closely with Jesus, they personify for us, **HOPE**, engraved in Jesus’ great promise as He ascends to heaven, **to be with us**

'always to the end of time' (Matthew 28:20). Similarly, in the Acts of the Apostles, we witness women such as Aquila, Lydia and Tabitha engaging in works of charity and serving the poor. Thus, the life and witness of Jesus amid the violence he encountered in His time, and we too today, continue to inspire women in their homes, places of work and different ministries, to endeavour to follow the 'nonviolent Jesus' who shows great love to all even 'the enemy'; "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*" (Luke 23:34).