

6. Remaining in transmission: *stabat Mater*

Considering what I tried to say about transmission, it is clear, I think, that we cannot “last” in a vocation, live our vocation in a living and fruitful fidelity, without indeed conceiving of it as linked to the transmission of Christ. Without transmission, fidelity becomes a *standby* mode without source or fulfillment. You are there, you resist, but like those apartment plants that maybe are nice to look at but have no purpose or fruitfulness.

To last in transmitting Christ, which should be the meaning of our faithful stability, is, by contrast, an attitude that manifests a radiant personality, a “being person,” because it is an attitude that links the presence of a monk, of a nun, of a community, to the mission of an Other (with a capital O!), or better: to the presence of an Other on a mission.

The most striking icon of lasting in this way is the Virgin Mary in her manner of living the time of her earthly life in relation to the mission of her Son. Mary had no other vocation than serving the mission of the Son sent by the Father to save the world. No one shared in the mission of Jesus more intensely than his Mother. At times I think that St. Paul could have written some more lines about the Virgin Mary. But the one phrase in the letter to the Galatians in which the Apostle alludes to Mary says practically everything about her mystery: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children” (Gal 4:4-5).

The Son of God is born of a woman because he is *sent* by the Father to make us sons of God. God is born *for us*, the Son of God is born in the world *for us*. To understand the meaning of the divine maternity of Mary, it is necessary to situate it in that movement that goes from the Trinity toward man, to save him through Christ. Mary is the Mother of Jesus Christ because “God sent his Son,” because the Father gives the Son the mission of saving all human beings by making them children of God animated by the Holy Spirit. Mary would not be the Mother of Jesus Christ, Mother of God, if God did not want to save us, rescue us by making us his sons and daughters. God makes Mary the Mother of his Son to give us birth to divine life.

The Virgin Mary did not go off on mission, but persevered in every instant of her life in transmitting the Son to the world. Let us imagine the intensity with which Mary lived the duration of her life in Nazareth and during the thirty years in which Jesus was with her, and then during the three years in which He was on public mission. Let us imagine the constancy in transmitting her Son after Jesus’ ascension into heaven, when Mary lived discretely in the first Christian community, when she lived with John. She was complete participation in the Son’s, and hence the Church’s, mission of salvation. She lived a permanence, an ardent and fruitful stability, because she was entirely in a communion of love with Jesus and with Jesus’ love for the world.

The Virgin Mary consented from the Annunciation on to be the servant of Christ's mission. Since the Emmanuel was on mission from his very conception, was sent as "Jesus," as "God who saves." Mary lived the Son's transmission to the world to such an extent that she involuntarily anticipated its moments, at the wedding feast of Cana (cf. Jn 2:3-5). She was never concerned with the proper times and means of the Son's mission. It was not her job. She allowed it to happen in obedience to the Father, like Jesus did, for his part. But she always kept lighted the lamp of awareness that every instant of Jesus' life, of Jesus' presence, was his mission in action, even when she watched him sleeping in the crib, or working with Joseph, or going out to pray in the solitude of the night or of the desert. And if, as on the occasion of the finding in the Temple, she could sometimes react rather too humanly to the behavior of her Son, it was only the occasion, for her and for Jesus, to "refresh" the meaning of their alliance, of their communion of life: the meaning of being united in obedience to the Father who sends his Son to save the world. Mary did not understand Jesus' answer to her reproach. But she does not insist. She silently reenters the presence of the Son's mission in action, reenters a permanence in which she stays attentive, with all her heart, to the event of the Son, so that the mission of Jesus come to illuminate hers, which is the mission of serving, of following, of remaining abandoned to the mission of the Son: "Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor" (Lk 2:51-52).

The culmination of this ability of Mary's to keep with the transmission of the Son is evidently her presence on Calvary, her "standing" at the foot of the Cross. No one participated in the redemptive mission of Christ crucified like his mother did. A participation of the heart, totally free in assent. From the practical point of view, someone like Simon of Cyrene participated in the Passion of Jesus more than Mary did. But interiorly, no one could have more com-passion than the Virgin.

The Gospel of John presents this participation to us precisely as a form of "stability," of a *Stabat Mater*: "By the cross of Jesus stood his mother" (Jn 19:25). The constancy of Mary's whole life, before and after the redemptive death of Jesus, is concentrated in the total density of love and faith of this "lasting" at the Cross. A presence, a "remaining" fruitful, because that is where Jesus makes Mary the mother of all. But it was in every moment of her life that Mary lived with this intensity of duration, with this fidelity to the Son's mission. And when the Son's mission is at its peak, on the Cross, it is the mission itself that brings the Virgin along, in the perfection and maternal universality of the transmission of Christ.