



# *Apostles for Today*

## *Reflections and prayer - May 2009*

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### **In communion with Mary.**

#### **I. Mary, Patroness of the Union of Catholic Apostolate**

**Introduction:** the month of May is traditionally a month dedicated to Mary, Jesus' beloved mother; in this month we celebrate the feasts of Mary, Queen of Apostles, and of the Visitation of Mary. St. Vincent entrusted his nascent foundation to Mary, he put it under her protection, he entrusted it to her as patroness and relied on her prayers and intercession. Article 3 of the General Statutes of our Union reads: "The Patroness of the Union is the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Apostles, exemplary model of the spiritual life and of apostolic zeal". We propose to reflect on Mary and pray with her in three issues of Apostles for Today.

St. Vincent wrote: "The pious Society operates under the efficacious protection of the Immaculate Mother of God, Queen of Apostles, for two holy purposes: the first is to obtain through the merits and the intercession of the great Mother of God, the Immaculate, all the graces and all the gifts in order that the Pious Society considered both as a moral body and in the individual (members) present and future may exist always in the Church of God and be fruitful and that it spread rapidly according to the needs of souls in any part of the world. The second purpose is that they all, lay people, secular clergy and religious of any order, state and condition have in Mary most Holy, after Jesus Christ, the most perfect model of true catholic zeal and of perfect charity ...". (OCCC I, p. 6-7, cf. also OCCC III, p. 6).

#### **Mary, our Mother, our Protector, our Patroness.**

This month we take the first purpose, Mary as our Mother, protector and patron. Fr. Vincent had a particularly strong devotion to Mary throughout his life even though the foundational experience of his life was his experience of God and his one over-riding purpose was to correspond to the three Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity, individually and as One God. His relationship with Mary did not take from this centrality of God in his life, rather Mary was Mother to him, and as the years went on Mary undertook to reveal to him her Son Jesus Christ, to obtain for him from her Son all the graces necessary for his life and mission. It was similar to Mary's attitude at the Wedding Feast in

Cana of Galilee (Jn, 2,5), she noticed a need, a lack, and she pointed it out to her Son, then she told those who were there “Do whatever he tells you”, and with complete trust and confidence waited until he responded and fulfilled her request.

Fr. Vincent was graced with several mystical experiences during the course of his life, one of these was his experience of January 9<sup>th</sup> when he received the charism of the Union. A second event that had a lasting effect on him and on his life was a Spiritual Espousal with Mary which took place on December 31<sup>st</sup> 1832, from this point on his relationship with Mary took on a new dimension, the experience is recorded in OOCX X, 195-6: he experienced it as a special grace which allowed him to enter into an intimate relationship with Mary. It is for him essentially an experience of mercy, first of all the mercy of Mary who mercifully deigned to make a spiritual marriage with him, he who considered himself to be among the poorest of all creatures on earth. Mary does not come empty-handed to this spiritual marriage, she brings her dowry, the dowry she gives Vincent is “all she possessed and helped him to recognize her own divine Son, and being the Spouse of the Holy Spirit she committed herself so that he be entirely transformed in the Holy Spirit.” Mary promised to give Vincent the gift of knowing her Son Jesus, and because she is the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, she commits herself to work for Vincent’s inner transformation in the power of the Holy Spirit. Vincent is deeply moved by this manifestation of God’s mercy; he speaks of “the mercy of Mary, immaculate Queen, who in love and devotion prays, intercedes and obtains” for him graces. He is convinced that this grace is an expression of the mercy of Jesus as he listens to the pleas of his Mother Mary on Vincent’s behalf. He concludes his account praying “Mercy, mercy, mercy, mercy, mercy, mercy, mercy, mercy, Paradise is full of Mary’s mercy. I will sing the mercies of God for all eternity, I will sing the mercies of Mary for all eternity. My God and my all.” In this account we see that Mary was not merely an object of devotion for Vincent, far from it, she was an active presence, it was she who took the initiative here, it was she who gave all of herself to him as dowry, she who committed herself to reveal her Son to Vincent.

We see here that Mary was Mother for Vincent, concerned for him, for his well-being, for his growth, for his happiness. She was a merciful Mother, mother of mercies. His experience was of Mary as Mother, a mother who was so moved by the ‘wretchedness’ of her son that she prayed, interceded and

obtained for him this special grace. Recently a woman asked me how Vincent's term of address for Mary can be translated, he referred to her as "la mia più che innamoratissima Madre", I suggested 'my beloved Mother', she was not satisfied with this and suggested 'my mother who is deeply in love with me and most dear to me'. She as a woman and mother was struck by the intensity of Vincent's feelings for Mary, fruit of her love for him and her activity in his life.

It was after this experience that Vincent began to prepare and write his treatises on the Month of May (of Mary) for the faithful, for religious and for the clergy. In fact he prepared all three texts in 1833, so full was he of enthusiasm and zeal to lead others to a deeper relationship with May. In the meditations for the faithful, Vincent puts words into Mary's mouth, she speaks lovingly to her children, invites them to learn of Jesus, through her, she invites them "...I, as a heavenly teacher will teach you with motherly affection to way of Paradise." (Preliminary meditation). Mary encourages the faithful who engage in these exercises by saying "I assure you my child in the joy that comes from the Most High, that my heart with maternal affection, and the heart of Jesus with infinite love, burn with a living desire to see you a saint, to see you a saint soon, to see you a great saint." OCCC XIII, p. 573. Mary goes on to assure the retreatant that the road to holiness is simple, it consists in listening in faith to her Son, who with his Word and his message of salvation offers us the means to attain it.

Mary is presented as Mother, as Teacher, as Mother of Mercy, as Advocate. This is clearly evident in the text of the day of preparation for the exercises; "Jesus said on the Cross: 'Behold your Mother' (Jn.19,27), my divine Son Jesus, in his agony on the Cross forgot the sins of his creatures ... and left me to his beloved disciple John as Mother, and in John Mother of all the children of the Church ... he (Jesus) wishes that you, my child, even though you may be a sinner, in this month consecrated to me, recognise me as your Mother, experience me as Mother of Mercies ... I, as your heavenly Teacher will teach you with maternal affection to way to heaven ... and even though you know your sins I do not want you ever to lose courage because I am your Mother, your Advocate, the Refuge of sinners, and as the Daughter of the Eternal Father I am able to help you in all your needs..." OCCC XIII; 550-51.

However, in all of this devotion and love of Mary Vincent never loses sight of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All the exercises are based on an attentive

listening to the Word of God as seen through the eyes and heart of Mary, the purpose of the meditations is the building up of the Kingdom of God. The entire spiritual exercise is oriented towards an increase of faith, hope and love, and to lead the person to a greater commitment to the works of faith and charity in the world.

### **Let us meditate together:**

John 19, 25-27: “Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, ‘Woman, this is your son’. Then to the disciple he said, ‘This is your mother’. And from that moment the disciple made a place for her in his home.”

John 2, 3-4 “...the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine’. Jesus said, ‘Woman, why turn to me? My hour has not come yet.’ His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tell you’.

### **And with the Church let us sing Mary’s hymn, the Magnificat.**

#### **Sharing of experiences**

Which is my preferred title of Mary? Can I express why one of Mary’s titles or attributes is more important to me than others? How do I live my relationship with Mary?

### **Let us end with prayer:**

1. “St. Vincent Pallotti, from your earliest days you were ardently devoted to the Mother of God. You were indebted to her in a special way for your growth in grace and in the love of God.
2. We ardently desire the same effects of her intercession that you experienced in your life. Intercede for us, therefore, St. Vincent, that we may obtain an enlightened conscience and be able to understand the greatness of the Mother of God, to have an unshakable faith in her, and to leave our lives in her hands. Obtain for us also a child-like and truly dedicated love for her and a courageous heart to follow her virtuous example.” Pallottine Community Prayers, page 241.



# *Apostles for Today*

*Reflection and Prayer - June 2009*

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In communion with Mary

## **II. “Mary, Queen of Apostles, exemplary model of the spiritual life”.**

This month we will reflect on this topic taken from article 3 of the General Statutes of the Union. Mary, the exemplary model of the spiritual life, occupies a central place in our Pallottine spirituality. As we contemplate the icon of Mary in the Cenacle in prayer with the Apostles we are invited to cultivate our personal and community prayer life which are part of our growth in experience of God.

The Cenacle is an ideal place to develop the contemplation which underpins our spiritual life and motivates us to mission. Prayer and apostolate go hand in hand, but it is prayer which moves apostolic action. Our ‘Pentecost’ begins with baptism.

“All these joined in continuous prayer, together with several women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers” (Acts 1,14). In the Cenacle Mary encouraged the Apostles to wait for the coming of the Spirit, the Paraclete, because without Him (cf. 1Cor 12,3) we can do nothing.

Mary present in the Cenacle, at Pentecost, is a model of the praying Church for the entire Christian community, she teaches that: a) as Church, **we need to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**. Jesus told his Apostles not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for what the Father had promised (cf. Acts 1,4-5); b) **we need to prepare ourselves to receive the gift of the Spirit**, in the same way in which Mary, the Apostles and the women prepared themselves, **in prayer**. The Acts of the Apostles affirms several times that the descent of the Holy Spirit is linked to prayer. We have need of the Holy Spirit to be able to pray and we pray to receive the Holy Spirit. This gift is freely given to us and we, in prayer, allow it to grow and bear fruit. It is life-giving when our hearts pray with faith for one another, when we say ‘Come Holy Spirit!'; c) it is also necessary that **this prayer be united and persevering**, just as in the Cenacle, “the whole group of believers was united, heart and soul” (Acts 4,32). The power of prayer is increased in the miracle of love.

## **Mary, our model of prayer**

**Personal prayer** – Mary lived life deeply, in the Spirit, in an attitude of prayer. Her life was transformed through an intimate, loving, intense and continuous union with God. She herself was always attentive to his permanent and active presence. Mary’s prayer was centered on God and not on herself.

Mary, a silent woman, loved being with God, she sought out intimacy with him in personal prayer; in Nazareth she meditated and listened attentively to God speaking to her heart. Mary’s meditative prayer is noted twice by the Evangelist Luke: at the birth of Jesus, at the moment when all were “astonished” and “as for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Lk. 2,19), and twelve years later when she found her son who have been lost for three days, she once again prayed in silence (cf. Lk. 2, 51).

Mary teaches us that our life in the Spirit needs to be cultivated in silence in order to acquire its true value. St. Vincent Pallotti wrote “Silence predisposes one for prayer and leads us to intimate union with God” (point 9 of the 33 points of the Fundamental Rule). He also taught us to give priority to the moments of intense personal prayer in order to consolidate our apostolic mission.

## **A spirituality for daily life**

It is possible to fall into a trap of separating life and prayer, for this reason it is necessary to develop a spirituality of daily life, one that is lived in times of joy and success, sorrow and suffering. Mary lived her daily life fully, but in the simplicity of Nazareth, and this is what we live each day. She prayed in all that she did because she lived fully in communion and in harmony with God.

We too can pray in daily life through persons, events and in and through all that we do. We have the example of Jesus, of Mary and of our holy Founder, St. Vincent, who as Fr. Faller wrote, was “a man who became prayer”, because he lived immersed in God and prayed in all he did, he was a contemplative in action.

In our spiritual life the ordinary prevails over the extraordinary. Prayer, contemplation of life in God, involves all of our being. Experience of God can be lived in “the heart of life” in every moment and in whatever mission we engage in.

Prayer is a question of love, of priorities and of perseverance. The fundamental motivation is always LOVE. God loves us first and awakens in us love for him, but our FAITH and our CONCRETE COMMITMENT are also important factors. St. James says “Faith without works is dead” (Jm 2,17). The more we show forth God in concrete ways the greater chance we have of rereading events in the light of faith and of responding to the challenges posed by our world. Spirituality is incarnated in reality.

### **Mary our model of community prayer**

Mary is also a model of community prayer. After the Ascension we find her with the Christian community gathered together ‘in the upper room’, in prayer, waiting for the Holy Spirit: “...and Mary by her prayers imploring the gift of the Spirit, who had already overshadowed her in the Annunciation” (LG 59).

Mary occupies a central place in the Cenacle, the Christian meeting for community prayer. She is a permanent, loving and encouraging presence for all. As she prayed in the Cenacle Mary once more “treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart”.

The Cenacle becomes a mystical Bethlehem where she once again conceives through the power of the Holy Spirit. Through this rebirth Jesus, through the Spirit, remains always with his Church.

Mary is close to the Apostles and to the women, she prays and together with them waits for the fullness of the Spirit. With her silent praying presence she plays an exemplary role in the Church. The Holy Spirit generates Community. At Pentecost the first community of Jerusalem was formed with its special characteristics: “These remained faithful to the teaching of the Apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers” (Acts 2,42).

Common and shared prayer sustain our Christian communities: we gather with one another and with God as one large Christian family. Christ the Apostle promised “Where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them” (Mt. 18,20).

### **Mary model of contemplative prayer**

Mary is the perfect contemplative, she looks at God and at all persons with wonder. In her looking towards God we see concentrated all the transparency of creation, we see the divine will and its revelation, and here the Word, Jesus Christ, centre of the universe and of history, is generated.

In Mary contemplation and service are inseparable, they are an expression of the fruit of love. Her ‘Magnificat’ arises out of her silent contemplation of the Incarnate Word in her womb. It is a hymn that proclaims the victory of her people, of the humble, the simple, those without a voice, the obedient, those who entrust themselves to the will of God. She in wonder, sings of her personal experience of God, of all that He has done with His People.

### **Mary’s place in Vincent Pallotti’s spiritual life**

In Vincent’s spiritual journey Mary occupied a central place, but secondary to that of Christ. As a child he used to say “My Mother, make me holy”. He prayed the Rosary every day with his family. His mother transmitted to him a tender affection for Mary. He says to us “a person who has true devotion to Mary will not only be saved, but through her intercession will become a great saint and his/her holiness will grow daily” (OCCC V 447).

Vincent lived a deep Marian spirituality, he sought to imitate Mary in her virtues, in her spiritual life “I intend to imagine myself as being close to my dearly beloved mother Mary in order to possess purity in all”. Vincent saw Mary at the foot of the Cross as the co-redemptrix. She collaborates in the redemption of humanity together with her Son in the work of salvation.

As a young man Vincent formulated an intention to be in the Cenacle “Wherever I shall be, I intend to imagine myself to be together with all creatures in the Cenacle in Jerusalem where the Apostles received the Holy Spirit...As the Apostles were there with Mary ...” (OCCC X, 86-87). “I intend to imagine myself as being together with my loving Mother Mary and my beloved Jesus (...) they will cause the abundance of the Holy Spirit to come down on me and on the others ... (OCCC X, 86-87).

We also have in Mary, but after Jesus, the most perfect model for our spiritual and apostolic life.

Shared reflection:

- What is Mary’s place in my spiritual life?
- What is my ‘every day’ experience of God?
- Mary is our model – how can I describe my spiritual life in the face of the events and the challenges of the present day world?





# *Apostles for Today*

*Reflection and Prayer - July 2009*

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## In communion with Mary

### III. “Mary, Queen of Apostles, exemplary model of apostolic zeal”

This month we conclude our three part reflection on article 3 of the General Statutes of the UAC and take as the theme for our reflection ‘Mary, Queen of Apostles, exemplary model of apostolic zeal’. As such Mary is **the Model for the Apostolate of All**. Vincent Pallotti’s 1835 appeal to the Catholics of his time to join the “Union of Catholic Apostolate,” was born out of an urgent need to awaken the whole Church to serve the mission which Jesus had entrusted to her. Vincent’s was not a movement **in** the Church but a movement **of** the Church. His vision of apostolate was world-embracing, it was not to take over the official apostolate of the Church (of which as he was accused) but to be of service to it. He was aware of the mobilization of anti-Christian forces that intended not only the unification of Italy but the creation of a new humanistic secular society with Rome at its centre. In response Vincent sought to mobilize all, especially religious and lay people, in a collaborative work of “Catholic Apostolate.”

#### *Mary, Queen of Apostles: trigger releasing the Church’s hidden potential*

How could he do this when the official Church was opposed to any seemingly laicist movements? The theology of that period was that Catholic Apostolate belonged only to the Pope and the Propagation of the Faith to those trained for it. Vincent found his answer in the title given to Mary in the Litany of Loreto as Queen of Apostles. She was neither a priest or bishop, she did not preach, yet the Church acknowledged that she was superior to the Apostles. He wrote, “The Church honours Mary as having the merit common to the Apostles without the office of preacher” (OCCC IV:325). Mary’s unique role is as a lay person who, nevertheless, is endowed with the title and merits of the Apostles. Her role is extended to include not only Apostles with a capital “A” but the myriad of small “a” apostles in every sphere of life. “One who is not a priest can be honoured with the name apostle, and his/her work an apostolate” (OCCC III: 140, cf. 182).

#### *Mary’s life: a Gospel beyond words*

In 1976 a French Church Commission consulted women on their role in evangelisation. One woman wrote, “A woman is more suited to what pertains to life rather than structure, more suited to activity involving personal relationships. A true life is a life lived according to the Gospel. This goes before any other consideration. If you would preach a sermon, you must yourself be a sermon.” This was especially true of Mary, honoured three-fold as Queen of Apostles: by “her true Catholic zeal and perfect love;” her “surpassing the Apostles in merit”; her “cooperation in spreading the faith far beyond the Apostles” (OCCC I:7).

## *Catching the fire of the Spirit*

Mary evangelised in a unique way by her faithful mothering of Jesus and the apostles. Mary's radical openness to God's Word and Will sprang from a strong, realistic self as she enquired, "How can this be?" A self coupled with a readiness to surrender, "Let it be, let it be done, let it become flesh in me." Mary remained faithful under the cross. She put courage into the disciples by her presence, and readied them for the transforming experience of the Spirit. Did they ask Mary, "Oh tell us, tell us what happened when the Spirit came on you?" Mary would not only tell them, but lead them to prepare for the Spirit in the ways she knew: of silence, unceasing prayer and by interceding powerfully with her Spouse the Holy Spirit. What came first was the desire, wanting to be used by Jesus, to carry on his mission. Mary led them further in disciplined learning, to await the Spirit who ignited them into action. That desire disposed them to receive the Spirit who brought all they had learned from Jesus on fire within them. "If you lack courage," Mary says to priests, "pray to me with confidence. I shall ask the Holy Spirit (my Spouse) that he may set you on fire with his infinite charity, so necessary to exercise the apostolate of Jesus Christ" (Month of May for Clerics, 80). Vincent's own life, his initial devotion to Mary, Queen of Apostles in the Cenacle, became a dynamic reality after his Espousals of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1832, when Mary, Spouse of the Spirit and Queen of Apostles, empowered him for ministry through the graces of her Son. When Vincent wanted to rouse apostolic idealism in people he invoked the image of Mary as Queen of Apostles; when he wanted to awaken the inner life of the people, to nurture them, he spoke of her Motherhood.

## *Holiness: living from the heart outwards*

Vincent was convinced that holiness gives power to apostolate. "Holiness consists in fulfilling with exactness and pure intention the duties of one's state of life" (OCC X:111), and doing it from an apostolic intent. "With all her power Mary cooperated in the propagation of the faith without preaching but, in the ordinary circumstances of her life, doing it with such perfection that she surpassed the Apostles in merit ...." (OCC III: 145). When we try to live the virtues of Jesus and Mary in an inner way we become transparent of God, not for ourselves but for others. Vincent described this process for lay people, "Internal holiness of heart enlivens and vivifies the exterior of a person so that all may glorify our heavenly Father" (Month of May for Lay People, Day 18). The external act had to mirror the inner intent. Mary modelled the interior quality of holiness linked to a gospel following of Jesus in her daily life. It was lived holiness.

Every aspect of Mary's self was consciously used to bring Christ to birth in herself and in others. How Mary used things to nourish the humanity of the incarnate One, inspired Vincent "to understand and imitate [Jesus] in the use of created things ... to do the Will of the Father according to the designs and ends of infinite Love." (OCC X: 260). Her divine maternity nurturing Christ through faith, became a spiritual mothering of all under the cross. In her zeal, "Mary, burning with love, desired to give her life with her Son for the salvation of the human race" (OCC IV: 450). She journeyed from a mother's love to the dedication of a disciple. Vincent taught people that they could share in the merit of the apostolate corresponding to their zeal in cooperating in the spread of the Gospel (OCC IV:136).

## *Mary, model of ministry*

By her life Mary witnessed to that essential aspect necessary in every ministry, whether priestly or lay, namely, spiritual motherhood: a faith-filled and loving openness to God's power giving birth to Jesus. Mother Mary uses her intercessory power to produce Christ in us (cf. OOCC III: 78-9); and discipleship: a conforming of herself to Jesus, that is, a faithful imitation of him in her whole life, body, mind and heart, thereby making Christ present to men and women so that they may experience God's saving power. "Mary walked so faithfully in the footsteps of her Son that she surpassed all the angels and saints" (Ep Lat 20). Mary, Queen of Apostles, stands at the very heart of the one mission and diversity of ministries within the People of God. When the title of the Union "Catholic Apostolate" came under fire, Pallotti placed it under the special protection of Mary Queen of Apostles. That name said it all. She was his advocate, intercessor, and the great missionary.

### **Shared reflection:**

In what way can Mary, Queen of Apostles, help us catch fire as apostles?

How would Vincent motivate people to live the spirit of UAC?

What is your experience of Mary reawakening your faith-relationship with Father, Son and Spirit?