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Marek Kluz

The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków, Poland

Mary is a Model of Faith and Moral Life for the Contemporary Disciples of Christ

Abstract

Observing the transformations taking place in the world, it is important to note the need for continuous reference in various areas of human life to Mary, whose example is always relevant. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to present Mary as a model of faith and moral life for the contemporary disciples of Christ. Mary – with her example – teaches one how to be a disciple of Christ in an authentic way, not superficial one. She is an example of understanding the Christian life as a commitment. Looking to Mary as an example, the individual learns to obey God in the path of faith and finds the values that lead him or her through the paths of the Christian moral life. Life permeated with the Marian spirit becomes an inspiration for the contemporary disciples of Christ to grow in faith, to do good and radically reject everything which is in contrary to the Christian ideal.

Keywords

Mary, model, obedience, faith, moral life, Christian.

1. Introduction

Observing the transformations taking place in the world, one must always emphasize the need for a continuous reference in various areas of human life to Mary, whose example is always relevant. Pope Francis in the apostolic exhortation of *Evangelii Gaudium* emphasizes that ‘there is a Marian style of the

evangelizing activity of the Church (...). Mary is able to recognize the traces of the Spirit of God in great events, and also in those that seem imperceptible. She contemplates the mysteries of God in the world, in the history and in the everyday life of each and all.¹ Disciples of Christ, taking steps on the way leading to Father's house, always follow the way of Mary who orders to listen faithfully to God's voice and lead an authentic moral life. Mary is a reflection of all virtues, therefore, when seeking examples to attain the perfection of life, the Christian should become more and more like Mary.

Therefore, the objective of this article will be to present Mary as a model of faith and moral life for the contemporary disciples of Christ. Mary is the one who totally surrenders to God. She responded by faith to the call to become the Mother of His Son. By contemplating the example of Mary as the Lord's Servant, an individual learns to obey God through the road of faith and finds the values which lead him through the paths of the Christian moral life.

2. Mary's way of faith is a model for the disciples of Christ

The role that Mary played in the history of salvation can only be understood in the light of faith.² In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* we read that 'only faith can adhere to the mysterious path of God's omnipotence. This faith prides itself on its weakness to draw the power of Christ to it. The most perfect example of this faith is the Virgin Mary who believed that 'there is nothing impossible for God' (Lk 1,37).³ By obedience to faith, Mary entered the history of salvation. The scene of the Annunciation constitutes a crucial moment. 'Through faith, Mary accepted the words of the angel and believed in the promise that she would become the Mother of God in obedience to her devotion.'⁴ Mary – demonstrating 'obedience to faith' by complete submission of reason and will, fully entrusted herself to God. She responded with all her person. In this faithful response there was perfect collaboration with the grace of God and a perfect sensitivity to the action of the Holy Spirit. Mary – accepting the Annunciation – was to become

¹ *Evangelii gaudium* 288.

² Cf. B. Martelet, *Maryja z Nazaretu*, Kraków 1995, p. 16-17.

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 273.

⁴ Francis, *Apostolic Letter 'Porta fidei'*, Kraków 2012, no 13.

the 'Mother of the Lord'. And she expresses her consent. This *fiat* decided the fulfilment of God's mystery from the human side.⁵

Since the announcement of her *fiat*, Mary – as Pope Francis teaches – for many years communes with the mystery of her Son and advances in her pilgrimage of faith.⁶ Mary is surprisingly full of light, yet, she is also covered with shadows. The light of the highest light is the moment of the Annunciation and Visitation of Elizabeth, the Magnificat which is full of adoration and the ability of her heart to meditate. The power of her intercession in Cana and the strength with which she stands under the cross is a great light on the path of faith. However, Joseph's distressing doubts, the prophecy of Simeon, the escape to Egypt, the confusion of Jesus and His incomprehensible answer constitute the spheres of the shadow, the sacrifice through which the work of the Mother was accomplished. Mary's participation in the Son's mission was completely internal and profound.⁷

The life of the faith of Mary deepened throughout her earthly wanderings all the time. It was courageous faith, filled with complete confidence. Therefore, Mary became a model of experiencing faith as the experience of effort and commitment. By believing in God's Word, she was able to embrace it fully in her life and by submitting to God's plans she agreed to accomplish all that the Most High demanded from her. Mary's faith was always submissive to the will of God.⁸

Pope John Paul II showed – on the pages of the Marian Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* – those moments which expressed complete obedience of the Mother of God through faith. He presented her as the one who gave her expression of 'obedience of faith' from the very beginning, assuming the meaning of the words of the Annunciation given by God himself.⁹ On this path of 'obedience to faith', Mary – later – heard other words that came from Simeon in the temple of Jerusalem which was the beginning of her *itinerary* of faith. Simeon addressed Mary with the following words: 'Behold, this is destined for the fall and the

⁵ Cf. *Lumen fidei* 58-59.

⁶ *Evangelii gaudium* 287.

⁷ Cf. G. M. Medica, *Maryja żywa Ewangelia Chrystusa*, transl. T. Siudy, Niepokalanów 1993, p. 15-16; R. Pannet, *Maryja w Kościele i w świecie*, transl. A. Liduchowska, Kraków 1995, p. 290.

⁸ Cf. John Paul II, *Wpływ Maryi na życie duchowe Kościoła* (22.11.1995), in: *Katechezy maryjne*, eds. L. Dudkiewicz, K. Klauza, Częstochowa 1998, p. 33-34.

⁹ Cf. *Redemptoris Mater* 15.

rising of many in Israel, and for the sign which they shall be opposed to, directly adding to Mary: 'And thy soul shall pierce, many hearts of mind' (Lk 2,34-35). These words placed the proclamation of the angel: Jesus is the Saviour, the 'light of enlightenment' (Lk 2,32) of people¹⁰ in the new light. The prophecy announced by Simeon forecasts the perfect and only sacrifice of the Cross which is to bring salvation that God has prepared for the nations.¹¹

Mary 'believed that the words spoken to her by the Lord would be fulfilled' (Lk 1,45) and at the same time she lived by the content of these words. The Pope Benedict XVI stresses that 'her obedient faith shapes her life at every moment with regard to the initiative of God. The listening virgin lived in complete harmony with the word of God; She kept the events of the life of her Son in her heart, somehow she made one mosaic from them (cf. Lk 2: 19.51)'.¹² During the years of Jesus' hidden life, her life is also 'hidden with Christ in God' (cf. Col 3,3) by faith. Every day she communes with an unspoken mystery that surpasses everything revealed in the Old Covenant. Mother Mary, only in faith and by faith is in communion with the truth of the Son. She believes each day, through all the experiences and adversities of Jesus' childhood and – afterwards – in the years of her life hidden in Nazareth. Remembering all the words of the Annunciation and subsequent events, she carries a complete 'newness' of faith. Mary dealt with the mystery of her Son for many years and she advances in her pilgrimage of faith as Jesus 'progressed in wisdom [...] and in grace in God and in men' (Lk 2,52). She also made an effort of the heart that was associated with the 'dark night of faith'. She faithfully walked in the way of faith also throughout the public life of Christ (cf. Mk 3, 21-35). Day by day, the blessing spoken by Elizabeth in the visitation was being fulfilled.¹³ Thanks to faith, Mary became a participant of the saving work of the Son. This faith allowed her to engage in this work to the extent that it was possible for a human being. In order to fulfil it, the task of the human being was to receive that message.¹⁴

Mary displayed complete obedience to God, she was faithful even when her pilgrimage of faith was filled with the terrible experience of Golgotha where she

¹⁰ Cf. *Redemptoris Mater* 16.

¹¹ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 529.

¹² *Verbum Domini* 27.

¹³ Cf. *Redemptoris Mater* 17.

¹⁴ Cf. L. Scheffczyk, *Maryja, Matka i Towarzyszka Chrystusa*, transl. J. Tumilewicz, Kraków 2004, p. 55.

was subject to the deepest 'kenosis'.¹⁵ Under the Cross she proved heroic 'obedience of faith' to 'unknown judgments' of God. Mary – by faith – participated in the shattering mystery of this destruction.¹⁶ At the foot of the Cross, the scope and perspective of the blessing of faith spreads as if from the very inside of the mystery of the Redemption. The expression 'The Blessed who believed' is the key to understanding Mary's inner truth: The One that the Angel greeted at the Annunciation as 'full of grace'.¹⁷

From the moment of the Annunciation, the whole 'itinerary towards God' began, her whole path of faith began. On this journey, 'obedience' was lived out in an unusual way. Mary – in the whole course of her submissive maternal *fiat* – testified that She was 'a woman of faith'.¹⁸ 'Her thoughts remain in syntony with the thoughts of God, her will accompanied the will of God'.¹⁹ At specific stages of her journey, the blessing of the One 'who believed' gained a particular meaning. Mary, who from the eternal will of the Most High found herself at the centre of the 'impenetrable roads' and 'unknown judgments' of God, surrendered in the twilight of faith, accepting all that was provided for in the plan of God completely and with an open heart.²⁰

Disciples of Christ experience difficulties, shadows, nights and dramas as well as torturing doubts on the way of their faith. After the joy and raptures of faith they can experience the moments of doubt and darkness of the night.²¹ Mary accompanies the Christian on the road to God. She is a teacher of faith and piety, full of silence and reverence, who teaches only using the testimony of the whole life which she gave to God. Her only treasure was her Only Son whom she wanted to serve in all things.²²

Mary is the one who – among all those fully devoted to God – is the first and most consecrated. Her spousal love reached its peak in the Divine Maternity

¹⁵ Cf. T. Siudy, *Maryja przyjmuje Ducha Świętego jako źródło wszelkiego wolnego daru łaski*, „*Salvatoris Mater*” 6 (2004) no 4, p. 64.

¹⁶ Cf. *Redemptoris Mater* 18.

¹⁷ Cf. *Redemptoris Mater* 19.

¹⁸ *Deus caritas est* 41.

¹⁹ *Deus caritas est* 41.

²⁰ Cf. *Redemptoris Mater* 14.

²¹ Cf. C. Napiórkowski, *Matka naszego Pana*, Tarnów 1992, p. 215-216.

²² Cf. J. Nagórny, *Maryja – nauczycielka pobożności*, w: *U boku Syna. Studia z mariologii biblijnej*, ed. J. Szłaga, Lublin 1984, p. 181.

by the power of the Most Holy Spirit. As the Mother, she carried the Christ in her arms, at the same time she perfectly fulfilled His call: 'Follow me'. She followed Him as her master in chastity, poverty and obedience. Poor at the Bethlehem night and poor at the Calvary. Completely obedient during the Annunciation and then at the foot of the Cross until the consent for death of the Son who became obedient until he died. Devoted – in the whole earthly life – to the kingdom of heaven with the purest love.²³

Mary also revealed complete availability to God in Cana of Galilee. Up to that moment, Jesus had not done any miracles yet. As a result, the request to the Son confirmed the courage of faith. The one who – believed in Jesus before seeing Him – contributed to the miracle of the virgin conception at the time of the Annunciation, giving evidence of hope in the undiscovered power of the Son and she provokes His 'first sign', the miraculous transformation of water into wine, contrary to disciples who would believe only after the miracle. What was more, by obtaining a wonderful sign, Mary supported their faith.²⁴

The statement spoken by Mary at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee presented her as a friend. Pope Francis in the above-mentioned apostolic exhortation of *Evangelii Gaudium* emphasizes that 'Mary is a friend who always takes care of us not to run out of wine in our lives.'²⁵ Yet, Mary was also the Teacher. Having said to the Son, 'They have no wine', she turned to the servants: 'Do whatever He tells you' (Jn 2,5). These words include a very important message addressed to all people, in each epoch. Listen to Jesus, follow His Word and trust Him, learn to say 'yes' to Christ in each circumstance of life. It is a message that is spiritually necessary for each person. 'Do whatever He tells you' Mary expressed – above all – the deepest secret of her life. She stands behind these words with her whole person. All her life was one great 'yes' to Christ, full of joy and trust. Mary, full of grace throughout her life, was completely open to God, in perfect harmony with His will – also in difficult times – where the most difficult were the ones which she experienced at Calvary, at the foot of the cross. She never withdrew her 'yes' as she had put her whole life into God's hands: 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, and let it be done according

²³ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation '*Redemptionis Donum*', Vatican 1984, no 17.

²⁴ Cf. John Paul II, *Maryja na godach w Kanie Galilejskiej* (26.02.1997), in: *Katechezy maryjne...*, p. 196; A. Jankowski, *Bliżej Bogarodzicy*, Kraków 2004, p. 31.

²⁵ *Evangelii Gaudium* 286.

to thy word' (Lk 1,38).²⁶ This short sentence contained the whole life program that Mary accomplished as the first of the disciples of Christ, and which she teaches each Christian today. It is a program of life based on the firm and stable foundation of Jesus Christ.²⁷

By following God's will, Mary anticipated and made the attitude of Christ her own, her submission proclaims and surpasses submission that Jesus displayed in His public life to Calvary. Christ will say, 'My food is to fulfil the will of Him who sent me, and to do His work (Jn 4,34). Similarly, the will of the Father was the principle for Mary that gave her the shape of her existence. She drew the strength she needed to fulfil her mission. Mary was completely obedient to the will of God, ready to experience all that God has planned for her, including the 'sword' that would penetrate her soul.²⁸

Being a disciple is – first of all – to imitate the Lord by following His paths, i.e. engaging in a constant search for harmony with His requirements, through a vital relationship with Him, ever more complete and profound. This way of living requires constant going beyond oneself in order to find our person in the One who is becoming the centre of our existence. Mary of Nazareth perfectly adhered to God's plan, however, she sometimes had to walk in the darkness of faith. In her heart there is specific expropriation of her understanding of God's plan for her. In the face of difficulties encountered on the way of vocation, 'Mary kept all these things and considered them in her heart' (Lk 2, 19.51). During the dark night of faith, she turned to the past, looking at how God worked in the history of salvation. This comparison turned on a new light that allows her to understand and accept the Lord's requirements to give herself to Him completely.²⁹ Through the darkness of faith Mary became the light herself. She was the first to light faith with her faith in those who did not know God. Only the person who experienced her darkness on his or her own could light faith this way. Then, this person was not a passive witness but a living instrument. Therefore, Mary's

²⁶ Cf. *Spe salvi* 49.

²⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Orędzie z okazji Światowego Dnia Młodzieży, 'Do whatever He tells you'* (13.12.1987), in: *Orędzia Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II*, Volume 1, eds. J. Jękot, P. Słabek, p. 171-172.

²⁸ Cf. Jan Paul II, *Posłuszna Służebnica Pańska* (04.09.1996), in: *Katechezy maryjne...*, p. 147-148.

Cf. D. Lombardo, *Droga powołania z Maryją, 'Salvatoris Mater'* 7 (2005) no 2, p. 202-203.

²⁹ Cf. P. Liszka, *Ciemności wiary Maryi, 'Salvatoris Mater'* 6 (2004) no 2, p. 128-129.

faith was a model for faith of the whole Church.³⁰ Mary demonstrated excellent obedience to God from the very beginning when she heard the word of God, simply unbelievable, yet, she accepted it by faith. She lived by this faith every day. In spite of difficulties, this faith developed continually in her and she was growing as she had perfectly trusted the leading hand of Yahweh.³¹

Discovering the next stages of the road of faith of Mary deepens the understanding of faith and allows the Christian to learn from her faith every day. She presents a 'peculiar hardship of the heart', particularly visible under the cross, when – in spite of her great suffering – she relies on God's will regarding Jesus. Looking to the wonderful pattern of Mary's faith, it must be pointed out that she accepted the word of God, she trusted this word and she was obedient to God as she did not only keep and consider it only in her heart, but, she fulfilled it with her whole life.³² Mary – constantly initiated in the matters whose meaning surpassed her – did not surrender and did not close herself to new words, yet, she gave them a place in her heart and she considered them all the time. She undertook an inexhaustible effort to understand everything as much as she was able to. She demonstrated obedience towards everything, based on her unconditional consent, as the plain 'servant of the Lord'.³³

This way of faith led Mary to a final exaltation, and thus she remained in the earthly history of the man as a sign of hope. 'Who, more than Mary,' teaches Pope Benedict XVI, 'might be the star of hope for us – she who through her eyes opened up the door of our world to God Himself; she who became the living Ark of the Covenant where God took the body becoming one of us'.³⁴ Mary's model of leadership should encourage each Christian to follow the path she followed, to imitate her and to promise to find a pattern and a model of life in the school of her example.

³⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 164.

³¹ Cf. C. Napiórkowski, *Matka naszego Pana...*, p. 216-217.

³² Cf. J. Nagórny, *Maryjny wymiar moralnego życia uczniów Chrystusa*, in: *Matka Jezusa wśród pielgrzymującego Kościoła*, eds. J. S. Sergiusz, K. Pek, Warszawa 1993, p. 299-300.

³³ Cf. H. U. von Balthasar, *Maryja na dziś*, trans. J. Waloszek, Wrocław 1989, p. 32-34.

³⁴ *Spe salvi*: 49.

3. Mary's moral lifestyle is a model for the disciples of Christ

The role of Mary in the moral life lies primarily in the fact that she constitutes the path to its foundation, which is the gift of God and the free response of the man to that gift. This should be the answer of trust, expressed first in the fundamental 'yes' and then confirmed in detailed choices that are the expression of obedience to God on the path of faith.³⁵

Faith is conditioned by Revelation. It is – in a sense – the response of the person to the Revelation of God. This answer can and must be given since God is credible. No one is as credible as He is. No one like Him has the authority of truth and nowhere else – as in faith in God – the conceptual and semantic value of words which are so frequently used in the human language as 'I believe you' is implemented.³⁶ The richness of giving whose 'addressee' is a man from the work of creation, raises the question of the appropriate attitude of this gift. The essence of such an attitude is embodied in the Marian *Magnificat*, 'which can be described as a portrait of her soul'.³⁷ In this song, Mary praised the great works of God, proclaimed the truth about the Holy God and the Omnipotent as the source of every gift.

Looking at the election of Mary, the Christian can read his or her vocation and bestowal in Christ in a better way. The perfect maturity of the moral life is the fruit of not only the human effort but the result of union with Christ in the Holy Spirit, the fruit of participation in God's life. The Christian understands that all good things done in life are the result of the action he or she undertakes in his or her inner reunion with God, this is what God does in the context of human choices and actions. God combined His eternal plan with Mary. In her life there is radiant love. Her contribution is related to a new self-manifestation and self-sharing of God. The calling of Mary is a confirmation of the truth about the Holy and Omnipotent God.³⁸ God – through grace – gives the ability to believe and – through inner enlightenment – it is possible to regard the reality inaccessible

³⁵ Cf. Paul VI, Maryja – Wzorem wiary. *Audienca ogólna (16.10.1967)*, in: *Paul VI, Trwajcie mocni w wierze*, volume 1, ed. J. Żukowicz, Kraków 1970, p. 79; T. Zadykowicz, *Rola Maryi w chrześcijańskim życiu moralnym*, 'Salvatoris Mater' 5 (2003) no 2, p. 42-43.

³⁶ Cf. John Paul II, 'Co to znaczy wierzyć? (13.03.1985)', in: *Katechezy o Bogu Ojcu*, ed. W. Zega, Kraków 1998, p. 25.

³⁷ *Verbum Domini* 28; Cf. *Deus caritas est* 41.

³⁸ Cf. J. Nagórny, *Maryjny wymiar ...*, p. 696-697.

to the mind as the truth. He enables us to enter into the dialogue of love with Christ. The person without special help from God is not able to believe.³⁹

Following the example of Mary, the Christian should adopt – in his or her moral life – a humble attitude towards the action of God in history. First, the individual must read his or her vocation in the context of giving, discovering the magnitude of his or her humanity, and agree to this greatness. The discovery of the gifted presence and worship of God gives rise to a true moral life. At the moment when God manifests Himself as Love, the individual discerns himself or herself with regard to his or her own dignity and greatness, and also what he or she should do. As a reasonable and free individual, he or she discerns his or her role in more than just a rational affirmation of what has been revealed to him or her. And here comes the response to Love, which is to be the attitude of trust and obedience. This attitude expressed in the fundamental ‘yes’, if it assumes the existential character, should involve the whole moral life of the individual, all his or her decisions that will confirm the first ‘yes.’⁴⁰ The fundamental confession of Mary, ‘the will to be completely for God as He is completely for Her,’⁴¹ was an unconditional consent to everything that was to be done. This consent was implemented in particular deeds through which she consciously shapes her moral life according to the will, wisdom and divine law.

To live the Christian life is to live with Mary and like Mary as she gave an example and model of Christian spirituality.⁴² By obeying the faith and regarding herself as the ‘servant of the Lord’, Mary became a model of submission and complete entrustment to the Supreme, which also implies the imitation of Jesus himself. By saying the above-mentioned words in Cana, ‘Do whatever He tells you’ (Jn 2,5) she gave the disciples of Christ a commandment according to which they would continually fulfil His will. This fulfilment of the will of Jesus was a manifestation of love and a cure for the weakness of faith. In her humble following the footsteps of Jesus, Mary fully implemented and became subject to the call of ‘Do not be afraid’ (Lk 1,30), which began and ended the work of Redemption. The joy and courage that characterized Mary’s life were

³⁹ Cf. S. Olejnik, *Teologia moralna życia osobistego*, Włocławek 1999, p. 70.

⁴⁰ Cf. T. Zadykowicz, *Rola Maryi...*, p. 48-49.

⁴¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2617.

⁴² Cf. R. Rogowski, *Duchowość maryjna w życiu duchowym chrześcijanina*, ‘Salvatoris Mater’ 5 (2003) no 2, p. 11; J. Kudasiewicz, *Biblijna droga pobożności maryjnej*, Kielce 2002, p. 5.

the expression of hope, trust to Him who said, 'Have courage: I have conquered the world' (Jn 16,33).⁴³ Christianity is a religion of joy and hope, acceptance of what is good and beautiful. Faith raises delight and leads to contemplation and meditation. This is where the source of Christian spirituality comes from.⁴⁴

The Virgin of Nazareth became the first 'witness' to the saving love of the Father and she is always her humble handmaiden. For every Christian, she is the first to 'believe' – and by this faith of the Beloved and the Mother, she wants to influence all those who trust in her like sons. The more a person abides in this trust and progresses in it, the more Mary brings him or her closer to the unspoken 'riches of Christ' (cf. Eph 3, 8). As a result, the individual recognises his or her dignity and the ultimate meaning of his or her life as well as vocation more completely.⁴⁵

Mary, the sublime Daughter of Zion, helps all people, wherever and whenever they live, to search for the way to the Father through Christ.⁴⁶ She – as the first and the most perfect disciple of Christ – fully reflects, in her person, the model of imitation of the holiness of God himself as she is all for Christ and for God. It is possible to see in her how it is possible to reflect God in the human life. Her greatness can only be seen in Christ. Therefore, a person learns how to follow Christ by looking at Mar, who is not only a model of demonstrating complete obedience, but also a teacher of the true Christian life.⁴⁷

The most important content of faith,⁴⁸ the great works of God are reflected in Mary. She teaches what it means to be a true disciple of Christ. As Pope Francis emphasizes, 'in her we see that humility and gentleness are not the virtues of the weak but the strong'.⁴⁹ Faith and loving acknowledgment of her virtues are not only to arouse attachment to the Mother of God, yet, they are to lead mainly to the true imitation of her virtues. Mary – in humility and obedience – was the first redeemed person awaiting Redeemer. This pattern must be understood as the spiritual fullness which Mary does not only proclaim but

⁴³ Cf. *Spe salvi* 50.

⁴⁴ Cf. R. Rogowski, *Duchowość maryjna...*, p. 12-16.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Redemptoris Mater* 46.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Redemptoris Mater* 47.

⁴⁷ Cf. D. Mastalska, *Maryja wzorem i nauczycielką w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II*, 'Salvatoris Mater' 5 (2003) no 3, p. 90.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Lumen gentium* 63.

⁴⁹ *Evangelii gaudium* 288.

she also presents. The Christians are obliged to listen to Mary's call directed to them and to follow her example, imitating her life as she is the guide and supporter in the pilgrimage of faith.⁵⁰

Christians should often ask Mary to teach them trust, hope and love, to instruct them how to go out to Jesus and to lead them towards Him so that He would be the answer to all human questions. In the school of Mary, the individual learns to contemplate the beauty of Christ's face. Mary leads to the spiritual path. In the footsteps of her journey, the disciple walks along the road leading to the meeting with the Lord. She is the prototype of the saved because she allowed her Divine Son to shape her through His divine perfection. She became an example of virtues and moral perfection to all people. Mary is the first Christian who leads and brings closer to Christ and – for all Christians – she is a model since she encourages to imitate her in the fundamental attitudes of the Christian moral life.⁵¹

Mary's maternity became true due to her special spirituality. With faith and obedience, she gave birth to the Son of God himself without knowing her husband. Like the 'new Eve' who believed the messenger of God without any doubt.⁵² It is clear from this that the faith and obedience of Mary, demonstrated at the time of the Annunciation, constitute the virtue which is worth imitating and – in a sense – they give rise to the maternal mission of the Church in the service of the people called to salvation.

Many believers in Mary seek support for their faith and moral life.⁵³ Mary is a model of our pilgrimage of faith, relying on the will of God, and – even against the hope – she teaches the love for Christ. A man who follows the example of Mary should accept the will of God in minor and great events. He should – like Mary – believe completely. And Mary – with Her life – testified that it was worth trusting God's promises. And throughout her life, with all her heart she was oriented at fulfilling the will of God. What is more, this virtue of obedience to God was not connected with the attitude of a passive life.⁵⁴

Thus, Mary – through her life – was the model of the perfect disciple of Christ who – on the way to the heavenly homeland – also established the earthly state

⁵⁰ Cf. D. Mastalska, *Maryja wzorem...*, p. 91-93.

⁵¹ Cf. D. Mastalska, *Maryja wzorem...*, p. 94.

⁵² Cf. *Lumen gentium* 63.

⁵³ Cf. John Paul II, *Maryja – wzór wiary*, 'Salvatoris Mater' 1 (1999) no 1, p. 365.

⁵⁴ Cf. D. Mastalska, *Maryja wzorem...*, p. 95-96.

and who was supposed to be a witness of love that created Christ in the human soul. From Mary the individual learns to love her Son and to carry Him spiritually in his or her heart. She is the woman clothed in the sun of God's love, a perfect example of the love of God and neighbour. 'The handmaid of the Lord', obedient in faith, gave a testimony of active love and courageous hope. She accepted the demands of love to the greatest sacrifice.⁵⁵

Objective faith is implemented through the imitation of Jesus in the present realities. His revelation takes place in the individual who imitates and carries Christ inside. It is the fruit of the special grace that helps to imitate Christ in a particular historical reality. Then, the double dimension is revealed: Christological as – objectively – faith refers to Christ and pneumatological as it is the Holy Spirit who moves the followers to the will of God. Mary's attitude is expressed in contemplation of the mystery of Christ in history and reflected in her heart. Therefore, she teaches to adore Christ, to walk with Him through life and to be like Him. No one has adhered to Jesus as strongly as His Mother.⁵⁶

Mary is the master of a plain life, but completely devoted to God, listening to His will, accepting the word of God in faith as her unshakable foundation. She is as a model for all people, regardless of their place in society, place of birth in time and space. This holiness is not imposed, it does not draw superficial fascination because there are no spectacular events in her life. It must be discovered in the silence of meditation, in prayer, in personal contact with God. The story of the slow discovery of her greatness by the Church seems to confirm this understanding of the mystery of her holiness. 'The Blessed One who believed' becomes a model and teacher of the daily faith and example of the true Christian moral life.⁵⁷

4. Completion

This reflection has shown that Mary is 'a perfect icon of faith'⁵⁸ and a model of the moral life for the contemporary Christian. She is a true Christian and she treats her vocation in a consistent and serious manner. Looking at the example

⁵⁵ Cf. *Deus caritas est* 41; *Spe salvi* 49.

⁵⁶ Cf. P. Liszka, *Ciemności wiary Maryi...*, p. 134-135.

⁵⁷ Cf. W. Zatorski, *Maryja – przewodniczka*, 'W drodze' 306 (1999), p. 35-36.

⁵⁸ *Lumen fidei* 58.

of Mary, the individual learns to obey God in the path of faith and finds the true meaning of his or her life. Her surrender to God, her faithfulness in fulfilling the vocation and her testimony of life is a norm and a signpost for all who seek to attain the moral holiness.

Mary's faith offers support to each disciple of Christ and, consequently, every Christian is invited to follow her example in his or her pilgrimage of faith. Faith, understood as complete self-giving to God, is the key to the Christian moral life. Mary accomplished what every disciple of Christ is called to in a perfect way. The person who contemplates the face of the Virgin of Nazareth learns to say 'yes' to God in everyday life, based on the fact that God always accompanies the human, also in moments of suffering and doubt, when all efforts seem fruitless. Mary asks the Christian to look further as she is an image of what can be achieved with the help of God and she teaches – with her life – how powerful grace is. Therefore, what is the most important in the Christian life and what gives it its true dimension and meaning can be found in Mary.

In this perspective, the Christian moral duty is to penetrate all the areas of human life following the example of Mary. Mary teaches how to be a disciple of Christ in a real way, not superficially. She is an example of understanding the Christian life as a commitment to develop the thought of the modern world in accordance with the principles of the Gospel in the face of new challenges. Moral life permeated with the Marian spirit becomes an inspiration for Christians to grow in faith, do good and radically reject everything that is in contrary to the Christian ideal.

It seems that the issues presented in this study constitute 'hot spots' of the contemporary mariological discussion. Therefore, it is hoped that the presented reflections will be an invitation to a more in-depth study of the discussed problems. Consequently, they may show the great and important tasks which the modern Church and every disciple of Christ still face as well as numerous reasons for believing in the Mother of God who continues to influence the form of faith and the moral life of modern Christians.

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