



Trip to OCD Convent in St. Agatha

June 16, 2012

Homily to OCDS Members

Fr. Dominic Borg, ocd

I would like to start this homily by recalling the last sentence of the Gospel where it said *“His mother treasured all these things in her heart.”* The last sentence that we find in the document *“Motu Proprio Porta Fidei”*, the Pope said that he is going to entrust this Year of Faith that will start on the 11th of this coming October and will end on the 24th of November, 2013 under the protection and the intercession of Mary, Our Mother, who believed the words that were spoken to her. And that was the word that Elizabeth said to Mary, *“and blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to her would be fulfilled.”*

In the document *Verbum Domini*, which is another document about the Word of God, the Pope says that Mary is the woman imbued with the Word of God. So he thinks that she is like a piece of meat marinated in the wine. Mary is the one who is imbued with the Word of God, and this is why the Pope encourages us to look towards Mary if you want to really learn the significance of the Word of God in our lives. When I was receiving the three new members, and I was handing to them the Bible, together with the book of Formation, the Rule of St Albert, the Constitutions and the Statutes, I said to them that the life of the Secular Carmelite is this *“to live in allegiance to our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Mary is the one who teaches us how to live in allegiance, how to listen to the Word, how to allow the Word of

God to become flesh in our lives. She is the one who teaches us that when we say *“let it be to me according to your Word”*, it will be so too. And so, it is of the utmost importance that we learn from her example because as Albert Einstein has said, *“example education is the best education”*. Mary gives us the example. We ought to be like Jesus Christ *“I have given you an example that the way I wash your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet.”*

To wash the feet of another means to die. We have to learn and it is not a choice, the way to follow Jesus Christ. We cannot follow Him without the Cross. And we all know what is the meaning of the Cross. It is a sentence to death, only to discover that in the Cross we live. It is no wonder that our Mother St. Teresa, on her meditations on the Song of Songs says that many are those people who think that they are carrying the cross. In reality they are just touching it, and by touching it, it will bring them to pieces. Others embrace it, only to discover, in the long-run, it is the cross that is carrying them.

We see it with Mary, embracing the Word of God, the Word of God carries her uphill, with haste, to be of service to Elizabeth. When we see that word *haste*, we enter into the mystery of rendering service with joy. Because with haste, not that you ask someone *“can you do this for me?”* *“I will think about it, if I have time tomorrow.”* I see that the world, as we go further, we are being infected too much with *“maniana”* syndrome .. *tomorrow, tomorrow*. Tomorrow, not now – leave it for tomorrow. But to render service with haste is to do it joyfully!

It is not enough that we render service, the Bible tells us. We have to do it with joy, render service with cheerfulness.

It is not enough that we celebrate our faith. Of course it is nice that we celebrate our faith, but recently the Pope has been hammering it constantly. It is not a matter of celebrating the faith, it is a matter of going deep down in our faith - that our roots will be very deep, that when we say *“Praise the Lord”*, we do not just say it with our lips; but like the psalmist says *“May the meditation in my heart, and the word on my lips be pleasing to you,*

oh Lord my God.” May what I am saying, be exactly what I mean. May what I am saying be exactly what I want to live. And this is where Mary stands in front of you and me as the great teacher, and especially you and me as Carmelites. We have to follow more closely the example of *John “standing near the Cross was his beloved disciple, and Jesus Christ looked at him and said ‘behold your mother’, and from that moment John made a place for her in his own home.” “made a place for her”*. When I was handing the Bible to the new candidates, I said “Let the Word of God, in all its richness, find a home within you.” In Colossians chapter 3, it explains that it is not enough that the Word of God will be in our brains brothers and sisters. God does not speak to our brains, he speaks to our heart. *“I will take back my people to the wilderness and speak tenderly to their hearts.”* The Bible is not the book of the brain. The Bible is the book of the heart.

And you and I, as Catholics, have to have a special relationship with Jesus Christ. We are not like the Jewish people. The Jewish people are the people of the book. We are the people of a person. Our relationship is not with a book. Our relationship is with a person. Even though the Jewish people too, is with a person because Judaism is not a faith, it is not a religion. Judaism is a relationship. “Your creator is your husband.” There is this relationship, that when we say *“The Lord is my Shepherd there is nothing I shall want.”* It is a relationship, it’s not some security, some shelter that we find in the Lord, it is a relationship *“I know my sheep, they know me. I know them by name. They listen to my voice.”* The Song of Songs says *“A voice, my beloved.”* She is able to recognize the voice quickly. And this is what Mary teaches you and me at the wedding feast of Cana. She says: *“Do whatever He tells you.”*

And today, in the Responsorial Psalm we responded together; *“My heart rejoices in the Lord my Savior.”* It is so beautiful. Jesus Christ is there at the wedding feast of Cana, Mary is there present. There is an abundance of wine. How many people know why wine is so important? Why is it so important? In the Jewish ceremony for a wedding there will be an abundance of wine. Why is it so important? I will tell you why quickly. If you have

an apple, and you have another apple, you squeeze them, liquidize them, and make apple juice. The one apple costs \$1, the other apple costs \$1., the juice may cost \$2.00 to \$3.00, not much higher, because you have two apples, \$1. and \$1. and then there is a little bit of work and you add another dollar. And it is the same with any other fruit, an orange and an orange, \$1. and \$1. you squeeze them you have orange juice and it is \$3. Not so with grapes. You have a bunch of grapes \$3., another bunch of grapes \$3. Put them together, you have wine – it is worth \$75. You buy it for \$75. It is a much higher price. And that is why wine is given in abundance in the Jewish ceremony for weddings. Because here you have two people, one by himself, he is worth \$3. she by herself is worth \$3., but when they come together and they are married and become one, then they are worth the \$75. And this why it reminds them about their importance of this unity. The same it is with you and with me, when we are united with the Word of God, it gives us great importance. It tells us that we are God’s children. As John says *“Look with what kind of love God has loved us that we can be called His children, and indeed we are.”* It is not a matter of imagination ***“and indeed we are”***. Mary is the one who comes to you and to me and says *“Do whatever He tells you.”* And if we put into the action the Word of God we experience a joy that no one and nothing will be able to take away from us. This is not empty happiness brothers and sisters. It is not like saying “Happy Easter”. I don’t want a Happy Easter, I want a blessed, a joyous Easter. Happiness can easily be stolen from you. So much so that in Malta nowadays sometimes we say “How are you doing?” “I was happy until I saw you. Now you stole my happiness, you stole my joy.” Happiness depends upon what’s happening. If what’s happening is what I had in my mind, in my plans, then I am going to be happy. But Scripture says *“My ways are not your ways and my thoughts are not your thoughts.”* So am I going to be unhappy? No. The Bible says *“These things I have said to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”* This is why when we put joy to suffering, it becomes sacrifice.

Jesus Christ did not save us with His suffering, He saved us with His sacrifice, the giving completely of Himself. He gave us Himself ... He sacrificed.

“God loved the world so much that He gave His Son.” Of course, in sacrifice there is suffering, there is the pain, but if we learn how to embrace it, what did Jesus Christ say? *“Now you have pain, now you have suffering, but you will see Me and you will rejoice, and no-one and nothing will be able to take your joy from you.”* This is the joy that the Word of God gives us. This is why the Talmud says “Joy is peace dancing and peace is joy resting.”

When we open our heart to the Word of God the way Mary opened her heart to the Word of Jesus Christ, are we on the same stage that Mary was before she found Jesus Christ in the Temple? What was that stage? The Gospel tells us, it says *“Mary and Joseph, assuming that Jesus was with them, they went in search for Him, only to the surprise that He was not.”* And sometimes this is the same with you and with me. We assume that we are good Christians, we assume that we are good Carmelites, only until the moment that we are tested. And when we are tested, you are not able to see Jesus Christ in your sister, you are not able to see Jesus Christ in your brother, you are not able to see Jesus Christ in the priest, in the deacon. You might be able to see, you are assuming that He was there, but you cannot see Him. And if you cannot see Him, is it a moment of discouragement?... No. It becomes a challenge, that like Mary and Joseph, we go in search of Jesus Christ until we find Him. When did they find Him? After three days. Why three days? Because it is the symbol of death. Lost for three days, lost in the tomb. But when they are moving towards the tomb, they are going to find Jesus Christ resurrected. He is alive. He is listening, He is teaching and everyone who listened to Him were all amazed with his teaching. And when Mary saw Him, and Joseph saw Him, they were astonished. Do you notice the language – amazement, astonishment, listening, the doctors there asking *“from where did he get this wisdom?”* The more we interact with this Word that we heard, the more this Word transforms us, it changes us. This Word helps us to see ourselves, to see who we are, not to see ourselves the way we think we are. That was the problem with the spies. When Moses sent his spies to spy upon the land, and they returned, except two of them, Calib and Jushua, they said “oh, the land is beautiful, but it is inhabited by giants, and we felt like grasshoppers, like grasshoppers in front

of them. And that is how they saw us too, like grasshoppers. This is like the guy who went to the psychiatrist to cure him, because he thought that he was a chick pea. And after a course of 6 months the psychiatrist, said to him, “now, are you ok?”, “Yes, I am.” “So, you know that you know that you are not a chick pea?” “Yes, I know, I am not a chick pea.” “So, you are ready to go out?” “Yes, I am.” So he dispensed him. And after ten minutes he came back looking for the psychiatrist saying “There is a chicken there.” “So what.” “He is going to eat me.” “You told me that you are convinced that you are not a chick pea.” “Yes, I am convinced, but the chicken does not know it.”

Sometimes we have this idea in our minds that we are slaves, that we are victims of our environment. We are conditioned, and then we begin to think that all those other guys think that I am stupid. You are right. If you think that you are stupid, what do you expect those other guys to think about you? We make ourselves like grasshoppers in front of them, and I think that it is the way they saw us. Whereas God showed them that they are not grasshoppers, God showed them that they are His children and He is going to fight against these giants, the giants of our problems. Many times we cause our own problems, we build our own path, because that is the path that we choose. But if we are wise, we follow the journey and faith is a journey. Always in the Bible, faith is not a bunch of doctrine, so much so that the present Pope has said that the Wisdom of the Gospel is not a doctrine, but it is the following of a person. This is what the Pope has said, that the Wisdom of the Gospel is not a doctrine, it is the following of a Person, and this Person is Jesus Christ. And we, like Mary, have to go in search for Him, and Scripture says *“You will search for Me and you will find Me when you search for Me with all your heart, with all your soul.”* It is not saying “I am reading Sacred Scripture, I am doing something.” ... No, because as St. Paul says *“The life I now live is for Christ, who loves me and gave Himself for me.”* Only to discover brothers and sisters, that it is God who is in charge of us. And we don’t know. We think that we are in search of God, which we are, but it is God who is in search for us. And we have to allow Him to find us, because otherwise we do the same thing ... *“Adam, Adam, aieka. ... Adam, Adam, where do you*

stand?” Rashi says “Did not God know everything? So why is he asking ‘Adam, Adam where do you stand.’ Is this not a useless question that God is asking? ‘Adam, Adam, where are you?’ God knows where Adam is. But asks in order that Adam will reflect ‘Where do I stand?’ Because Adam did not know where he was. He did not know where he stood in his relationship with Eve – in his relationship with God – in his relationship with the devil. He was listening more to the catechesis of his wife, he was listening more to the catechesis of the devil than toward God who had told him “*Don’t eat from that tree. Do not even touch it, because the moment you touch it, you will die.*” And the Midrash says that Eve, before the sin, the serpent was standing upright. The devil used to stand on his feet. And so Eve was near the tree that God told them not to touch. And the devil entered into a dialogue with Eve. “*Did not God tell you that you should not eat from any of the trees in the Garden?*” “*No, He did not, only from this tree.*” *As a matter of fact He told us that we should not even touch it.*” “*Is that so? You should not touch it?*” “*Because He said that if we touch it, we die.*” And the devil gave her a charge, and she hit the tree with her shoulder and she quickly turned away from it and the devil said to her “*You see, you did not die. God is a liar. You see, you did not die.*”

And sometimes, brothers and sisters, the way we live that is what we profess. When Jesus tells you and me “*If my Word abides in you, I and the Father will come and we will abide in you.*” If we, like John, take Mary to be our tutor, that is what it means – “*John made a place for Mary in his own home.*” Because in those days, you did not go to the house of your teacher, but you invite your teacher to come to your home as a sign that your heart is open for his teaching. When someone invites you to their home to eat, it a sign that the heart of that person is open for you, and the same it is for us. When we open our heart to the Word of God, when we look at the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ, “*I do as the Father has commanded me.*” When we look at Mary and open our heart to the Word of God “*Let it be done to me according to your Word.*” we will discover the secret of those three words “*Let it be.*” More easily said than done brothers and sisters.

Do we think that we are going to understand the Word? No, we will not. Mary did not understand everything ... she pondered. Mary who went in search of Jesus Christ “*My Son, why did you do this to me and to your father?*” Can you imagine the discussion that went on there between Joseph, herself and Jesus? I clearly have a good picture of this because I see it constantly and I hear it constantly. Parents come, and they say “Father, tell him to correct the child ... everything is on my shoulders ... he doesn’t correct him.” And so we can imagine Mary screaming yelling at Jesus because she is full of tension, and she is freaking out. And then, there is Joseph, not saying one word. “It is no wonder that the child goes wondering, look you don’t say anything to Him.” And then Joseph got it from her too. And Jesus Christ said to her “Do you not know that I MUST, that I have to be in the house of my Father?”

It is no wonder brothers and sisters that Mary is the ark of the covenant. But this notion of the ark of the covenant does not start with Mary. When God said to Noah “*Enter into the ark.*” *Tervei* is Aramaic, it means also “the word” ... So God said to Noah, “*Enter into the Word.*” The way a person enters into the ark a person enters into the Word, and that is what Mary did. “*Let it be done to me according to your Word.*”

So, I hope that as you stand here, at this celebration today, the celebration of the Eucharist, celebration also of members being received, receiving the Scapular, giving this moment of formation, other members making their promises, their definite promise we recall to mind to ourselves the meaning of these events and, like Mary, we ponder upon them. Ponder does not mean to think. For us, in English, it means “to think”, but for the Greek person, to ponder refers to the action when we take a seal, and place it on the wax and that action is called pondering. We allow the seal to leave its mark on the wax and then you place pressure on it to make sure that the image of that seal is clearly seen on the wax, and that action is called pondering. We open our hearts to the Word of God and without creating any obstacles to this Word, on the contrary, with our deeds, with our actions, with our cooperation to ‘grace given, grace received’, we will put into action the Word of God and leave an

imprint .. because the joy that the Word of God gives each one of us the Bible says "*is contagious*". Mary, greeted Elizabeth and Elizabeth said "*As soon as I heard your greeting, even the child in my womb leaped for joy.*" And this is what our Pope wants from each one of us, especially during this Year of Faith ahead of us, that we live our faith with joy, that we make sure that our roots are deep, not just saying "Praise the Lord", but that we praise Him with our actions. "*When they see your deeds they will give praise to your Father who is in heaven.*" This is the reason why the Talmud says clearly "The amount of light that our deeds radiate are always proportionate to the amount of joy we invest in doing those deeds." Mary went with haste to render service to Elizabeth. She filled it with joy, and the joy that she had in Her, she is contaminating Elizabeth and the baby inside her – "*As soon as I heard your greeting, even the child in my womb leapt for joy.*"