

Contemplating the Face of Christ in the Mysteries of the Rosary

In the Year of the Rosary St Pope John Paul the Great invited us, with even more insistence than he had done previously, to meditate upon the mysteries of the Rosary with Mary and through her eyes to contemplate the Face of her Son Jesus in each of them. For many of us this was a whole new perspective to take, because we are far more likely to ponder the pivotal events in the Rosary as a bystander 'looking-in' over all the participants rather than focusing on the Face of Jesus alone. The Year of Grace (Pentecost 2012 – Christ the King 2013) gave us another opportunity to take hold, perhaps for the first time, of the Graces St John Paul the Great wanted us to receive by seeing Him through Mary's eyes.

Joyful Mysteries – Contemplating the Face of Christ

The First Joyful Mystery: The Annunciation

'O, that You would tear the Heavens open and come down - at Your presence the mountains would melt... - to make known Your name to Your enemies, and make the nations tremble at Your presence, working unexpected miracles such as no one has ever heard of before.' Isaiah 64:1-3

With all of Israel Mary waited, prayed and eagerly longed for God to send His promised Messiah. How lovingly and eagerly she would have prayed for the salvation God promised His people. He could not resist the prayers of the one who loved Him so much and knew Him so well. To this holy virgin of Israel the Lord sent His angel to humbly make His request that she become the mother of His only begotten Son. With her unconditional 'Yes', the final count down to the time when all of creation could look upon the face of God began, and no one longed for that holy moment more ardently than she did.

The Second Joyful Mystery: The Visitation

'How beautiful on the mountains, are the feet of one who brings good news, who heralds peace, brings happiness, proclaims salvation... Listen! Your watchmen raise their voices, they shout for joy together, for they see the Lord face to face as He returns to Zion.' Isaiah 54:7-8

All expectant mothers long to see the faces of the little ones they carry hidden in their wombs. Mary was no exception. After the long journey into Judea, Mary greets her heavily pregnant cousin and in that blessed moment God reveals to the unborn John and his mother Elizabeth the news of His incarnate Son. Through Elizabeth and John, the first to whom this news is given, all creation rejoices in and welcomes the Saviour. At last Our Lady has someone to share this stupendous secret with, and someone to share her longing to see the face of Jesus with. Within her chaste womb the wonder of the formation of the face of Jesus is taking place, moment by amazing moment!

The Third Joyful Mystery: The Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem

'O God, be gracious and bless us and let the light of Your face shed its light upon us. So will Your ways be known upon earth and all nations learn Your saving help.' Psalm 67:1-2

The day of joy has come. Mary gazes for the first time upon the new-born features of her Son, her Saviour and her God. She can never tire of looking upon this beloved face. Joseph joins her, and soon the angels, the shepherds and the wise men are sent by God to join her in her adoration. This is the face of God's Son, the perfect revelation of His mystery and His infinite love. How great is her joy, watching Him as He sleeps serenely; studying His contentment as He suckles from her; looking into the sheer beauty of His eyes. How great is her concern lest His face reveal pain due to cold, hunger or discomfort.

The Fourth Joyful Mystery: The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple

'You who wanted no sacrifice or oblation, prepared a body for me. You took no pleasure in holocausts or sacrifices for sin; then I said, just as I was commanded in the scroll of the book, 'God, here I am! I am coming to obey Your will.' Hebrews 10:5b-7

The solemn moment has come. The time to offer her first born Son to the Eternal Father as the law of Israel requires. With great love she accepts this first agony of her heart: permitting her Son to undergo the pain of circumcision in order to keep the covenant ratified through Abraham so many centuries ago. In this pain Mary offers together with Jesus their united 'Yes' to all the suffering needed to follow the Father's Will and redeem sinful humanity. Through the holy Simeon's prophecy she learns that their offering has been accepted. Together with her we come to love Jesus when His face is full of affliction as well as when His face is full of radiant smiles. Together with Mary we begin to learn how to console and comfort Him.

The Fifth Joyful Mystery: The Finding of Jesus in the Temple

'O Lord, hear my voice as I cry! Pity me! Answer me! My heart has said of You, 'Seek His face'. O Lord, I do seek Your face; do not hide Your face from me.' Psalm 27:7-8

The joy of beholding the face of her 12 year old Jesus is suddenly and unexpectedly taken away from Mary. Her soul only finds rest in gazing upon His face and learning from Him. Now the delight of her eyes is missing, and even with Joseph's help she cannot find Him. In these dark moments she prays with the Psalmist, 'Why do You hide Your face from me?' (Psalm 88:14b) Through this trial Mary goes, trusting in God still, despite her perplexity. Like a flower deprived of water, so is her soul without seeing the face of Jesus. When the moment of reunion comes at last, what joy shines from her face! A joy made greater by the answering joy suffusing the features of her Son, reassuring her of His love and devotion.

Luminous Mysteries – Contemplating the Face of Christ

The First Luminous Mystery: The Baptism at the Jordan

'Here is My servant whom I uphold, My chosen One in whom My soul delights. I have endowed Him with My spirit that He may bring true justice to the nations.' Isaiah 42:1

Let us gaze with Mary upon the Face of her Son Jesus as He makes His way to the river bank to be baptized by John. On His beloved Face is the joy of doing the Father's will, even if it means getting wet in a smelly river and being considered a sinner. Mingled with this joy is the satisfaction and anticipation of at last beginning His public ministry, and being free to go wherever the Father's will blows. Coming up out of the waters Jesus is inundated with the Father's love. Radiance suffuses His Face, His Heart throbs with love given and received, and tears of joy and peace leak from His closed eyes. In this lavish exchange of Love the Holy Spirit is outpoured in power and majesty.

The Second Luminous Mystery: The Wedding at Cana

'O Lord, protector of man and beast, how precious, God, Your love! ...They feast on the bounty of Your house, You give them drink from Your river of pleasure ...Do not stop loving those who know You, or being righteous to upright hearts.' Psalm 36(35):6b,8,10.

Let us gaze with Mary as she searches the faces of the wedding guests for the Face of her most beloved Son Jesus. How much she has been looking forward to seeing Him again! Before she finds Him, the lack of wine at the wedding feast is made known to her. Greeting His mother, Jesus beams with joy at being with her. With simplicity and unlimited trust Mary tells Jesus about the situation which worries her, knowing that He has the power to arrange everything for the best. Not by a single expression does Jesus reveal what He is going to do. Mary continues to trust. Behind the scenes Jesus sorts everything out with a miracle. When next He catches His mother's eye there is deep gratitude in her glance and the twinkle of delight in His from the twin achievements of making His mother happy and helping the newly-wed couple avoid a disaster.

The Third Luminous Mystery: The Proclamation of the Kingdom of God

'The spirit of the Lord God has been given to Me, for the Lord has anointed Me. He has sent Me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken; to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison.' Isaiah 61:1

Let us gaze with Mary upon the Face of her Son Jesus as He preaches to the crowds about the Kingdom of God. With words and miracles Jesus teaches His listeners about the amazing love the Father has for them, and what they need to do to accept that love. As He speaks about the Father the glow of ardent love radiates from His Face, captivating the crowds. To come into that Kingdom requires the humility to accept that we are not in control and that God is. It requires obedience to the Father's ways. It requires sorrow over our sins, and seeking the Father's pardon. It requires living a new life where love for God and love for others guides all of our actions. In this Kingdom are all of the peace, happiness and goodness that radiate from the Face, mind and heart of Jesus to those gathered to hear the Good News.

The Fourth Luminous Mystery: The Transfiguration

'See how the Lord our God has shown us His glory and His greatness and we have heard His voice from the middle of the fire. Today we have seen that God can speak with man and man still live.' Deuteronomy 5:24
Let us gaze with Mary upon the Face of her Son Jesus as He climbs Mt Tabor with three chosen apostles in response to God's call to seek Him in prayer. What eagerness there is on the Face of Jesus to be reunited with His Father in prayer! As Jesus prays the Father permits the veil over the divinity of His Son to be lifted and manifested to the apostles, to Moses and to Elijah. Light, glory, love and divine beauty shine from the Face of Jesus as the Father inundates His Son with His love in preparation for the horrors and sorrows of the Passion to come. How radiant is the Face of Jesus receiving His Father's approval and encouragement! And yet how thoroughly normal His Face is as He returns, to His disciples and to the crowd, in order to complete the rest of His Father's will.

The Fifth Luminous Mystery: The Institution of the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper

'As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you. ...This is My commandment : love one another, as I have loved you. A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends.' John 15:9a,12-13
Let us gaze with Mary upon the Face of her Son Jesus as He gathers with His Apostles to celebrate the sacred Passover for the last time. When a person is deeply in love, that person is only truly happy when he or she has given to his or her beloved the very best they have. Only the total permanent gift of self, possessions, fertility and future in marriage is capable of satisfying the human heart's need to express the depths of love within it. In this most sacred meal Jesus gives Himself totally to His Apostles in Divine extravagance, and through them to each future member of His mystical Body. Transforming bread and wine into His own Body and Blood He gives His whole self, and all of heaven, to each one, and does so with all the love of a Divine Bridegroom. And this total donation of self by Jesus continues in each Holy Eucharist. The look of a happy bridegroom as he pronounces his wedding vows is only a shadow of the look upon the Face of Jesus at this most solemn moment; this moment of the initiation of the most stupendous ongoing miracle ever.

Sorrowful Mysteries – Contemplating the Face of Christ

The First Sorrowful Mystery: The Agony in the Garden

'They surrounded me, the snares of death, with the anguish of the tomb; they caught me, sorrow and distress. I called on the Lord's name. O Lord my God, deliver me.' Psalm 114(116):3-4

Let us look with Mary upon the Face of Jesus in His Agony. Upon His Face is the ardent desire to find the embrace of His Father through prayer, but all He perceives are sins. Paraded before Him is the full ugliness of sin, from the smallest to the most heinous, and at the same time He is made aware of what it will cost in terms of suffering to redeem each one. Each cost He accepts makes His Face pale and His flesh quiver. From His eyes come tears of sorrow for both the victim and the perpetrator of each sin. Then the vision changes and He sees all of those who will reject, ignore and undervalue the Mercy won at so high a price, and the pain compresses His body so much that blood begins to seep out of the pores of His skin to mingle with His tears and sweat. Finally after the depth of desolation is reached, an angel is sent to show the Suffering One all

those souls who will respond with generosity to His Mercy and with each name comes a drop of peace and the features of His Face begin to return to calm.

The Second Sorrowful Mystery: The Scourging at the Pillar

'Lay your scourge aside, I am worn out with the blows you deal me. You punish man with the penalties of sin. O Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for help, do not stay deaf to my crying.' Psalm 38(39):10,12a

Let us look with Mary upon the Face of Jesus as He suffers the blows of His scourging. There on His beloved Face is the discomfort of someone exposed and vulnerable, stiff with the pain of being restrained by ropes and chains in an unnatural position for too long. Flitting across His Face come prayerful offering and dread anticipation in quick succession. Each blow from the scourge contorts His Face in pain, as His mouth opens to let out His silent groans. With each blow, each painful gouge into His Flesh, His Face reflects greater humility, patience and endurance together with abject entreaty to the Father - begging that souls be forgiven their sins.

The Third Sorrowful Mystery: The Crowning with Thorns

'It is for You I am putting up with insults that cover me with shame....The insults of those who insult You fall on me. You know all the insults I endure, every one of my oppressors is known to You; the insults have broken my heart, my shame and disgrace are past cure.' Psalm 68(69):7,19

Let us look with Mary upon the Face of Jesus as the soldiers and guards mock Him and go to the cruel extent of making a crown out of thorns and pressing it painfully into His Head. To the cuts and bruises already on His face from the mob the Sanhedrin let loose on Him, the soldiers add their own slaps, punches, and blows. But more than the physical pain is the depth of the mockery and insults that rain upon Him. Rivulets of blood run down His Face from the puncture wounds of the thorns to mingle with the tears, dried blood, fresh blood from newly reopened wounds, and the array of globules of sweat, snot and refuse that have been showered upon Him. How different His Face is now to the smooth, bright one which the angels, shepherds and magi adored! And yet, under all that muck, the facial muscles which still function show that the work of humble prayer and entreaty goes on without interruption.

The Fourth Sorrowful Mystery: The Carrying of the Cross

'Guilt is overwhelming me, it is too heavy a burden; my wounds stink and are festering...bowed down, bent double, overcome, I go mourning all the day.' Psalm 37(38): 4-6

Let us look with Mary upon the Face of her Son Jesus as He carries His Cross to the place of execution. She can see how His garment is clinging to His torn skin, and how the sweat and blood stains have greatly disfigured the cloth. She notices the difficulty with which He drags the Cross along on His wounded shoulder, and can see through the caked grime and blood on His Face to the cast of His jaw - revealing the extent of His determination to totally fulfill His Father's Will. Taking her own courage in hand, she makes her way to Him through the blood-thirsty crowd and the soldiers. One of His eyes has been so affected by the blows that it can barely open, but in the other one the beautiful colour of the iris has not yet been obscured. In His glance, and in His difficulties forming a smile, His infinite love, gratitude and encouragement shine out to her. Renewed by the sight of His Mother, and her love, He stumbles on toward the apex of Calvary.

The Fifth Sorrowful Mystery: The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus

'I am like water draining away, my bones are all disjointed, my heart is like wax, melting inside me; my palate is drier than a potsherd, and my tongue is stuck to my jaw. A pack of dogs surrounds me, a gang of villains closes me in; they tie me hand and foot and leave me lying in the dust of death.' Psalm 21(22):14-16

Let us look with Mary upon the Face of her Son Jesus as, nailed to the Cross, He struggles for each breath. He has lost so much blood, His dear Face has shrunken inwards. Any effort to raise His head costs Him dearly. She watches each painful process He goes through to get air into His lungs, and hears the wheeze and rattle that come with each inhale and exhale. She listens, too, to the insults and jeers that are heaped upon Her Son and which are directed at herself as well. Like Jesus, she listens, suffers, but does not do anything in

response but pray silently in her heart for the trouble makers. All the features of His Face that she loves are obliterated, not one part of His Face, hair, beard and ears have escaped disfigurement. Steadfast, she stands and keeps vigil, as the life slowly drains from her Son and the time of His last gasp for air approaches. Intently she listens to and treasures each word that Jesus is able to articulate, and promises Him that she will care for each disciple with a mother's love. Silence and awe descend as the beating of the valiant heart of Jesus ceases, and the enormous cost of our redemption begins to be appreciated.

Glorious Mysteries – Contemplating the Face of Christ

The First Glorious Mystery: The Resurrection

'It is the same God that said, 'Let there be light shining out of darkness', Who has shone in our minds to radiate the light of the knowledge of God's glory, the glory on the Face of Christ.' 2 Cor 4:6

Let us look upon the Face of the Risen Christ with Mary. How happily her mother's heart must have studied His features, fully alive and glowing with love - and without any trace of the sorrows, burdens and sufferings with which it had been clouded in the preceding years, months and days. What an incredible smile He must have greeted her with in His risen glory! Do you think He might have lifted her up into His arms, close to His Heart and twirled her around the room with joy? Did they dance in celebration? Psalm 29(30):11-12 tends to indicate that they did, and these could easily have been Mary's own words to Him: *'You have turned my mourning into dancing, You have stripped off my sackcloth and wrapped me in gladness; and now my heart, silent no longer, will play you music; O Lord, my God, I will praise You for ever.'*

The Second Glorious Mystery: The Ascension

'For us, our homeland is in Heaven, and from Heaven comes the Saviour we are waiting for, the Lord Jesus Christ, and He will transfigure these wretched bodies of ours into copies of His glorious Body. He will do that by the same power with which He can subdue the whole universe.' Phil 3:20-21

Let us look upon the Face of the Ascending Christ with Mary: With what love and tenderness she sees Him look over the gathered disciples, the Judaeian landscape, over His chosen Eleven, the holy women and especially at her, His Mother. In those glances, as He takes His leave of this world, there is His blessing upon all creation, His thankfulness for the material things which caused His victorious redemptive sufferings, and His confident encouragement that these His dear ones will indeed take His Gospel successfully to the ends of the earth. Mary also sees on His beloved Face, His indescribable joy and utter longing to be reunited with the Father in His glorified humanity.

The Third Glorious Mystery: The Coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost

'Each one of us has been given his own share of Grace, given as Christ allotted it... And to some, His gift was that they should be apostles; to some prophets; to some, evangelists; to some, pastors and teachers; so that the Saints together make a unity in the work of service, building up the Body of Christ.' Eph 4:7,11-12

Let us look with Mary upon the Face of Christ sending His Holy Spirit to the Church. As the Holy Spirit fills the upper room and all those within it with the fire of His love, heart after heart is transformed. To His Mother, the Lord Jesus reveals the special charisms that He is giving to each one of them, so that she might share fully in His joy and in the visible beginning of the Body of Christ, His Church. She sees the delight and divine wisdom with which He bestows these precious charisms through the Holy Spirit, and sees the flood gates of Grace thrown wide open for the salvation of souls. His Face is radiant with the joy of a lavish giver who has determined *the* most perfect gift for each disciple, and full of expectant hope, waiting for them to discover the wonders He has given them, just as a father eagerly awaits the facial expressions on his son when opening up birthday gifts and the good use to which he hopes the youngster will put them.

The Fourth Glorious Mystery: The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

'Just as all men die in Adam, so all will be brought to life in Christ; but all of them in their proper order: Christ as the first-fruits and then, after the coming of Christ, those who belong to Him' 1 Cor 15:22-23

Let us look with Mary upon the Face of Christ as He welcomes her, body and soul, into eternal happiness. Have you ever seen the reunion of a mother and son at an airport, following a long absence from each other? The son's face is transformed; it lights up, there are smiles and laughter. And what does a son do when he gets his mother home? He shows off to her all that he has done in her absence and all of the grandchildren which may have come along in the interim. Likewise the radiance of the Face of Jesus is doubly bright when He welcomes her into her true homeland. Upon His Face is the eagerness to present her to the Father and the Holy Spirit, to all of the angels, and to all of the holy men and women redeemed by His Precious Blood and her sorrowful Tears, and then to show to her all of the other wonders of Heaven.

The Fifth Glorious Mystery: The Coronation of Our Lady as Queen of Heaven and Earth

'Her sons stand up and proclaim her blessed, her husband, too, sings her praises : 'Many women have done admirable things, but you surpass them all!'' Prov 31:28-29

Let us look with Mary upon the Face of Christ as He solemnly proclaims her Queen of Heaven and Earth to the loud acclamation of all the Heavenly citizens. After the hurly-burly of any home-coming, there comes time for a pause, for the words of an official welcome, a toast and a celebration. When successful Olympians return home there are parades, speeches and they are given the keys of the city, and all kinds of gifts and accolades. For His Mother, His special partner in the redemption of us all, Jesus has prepared the most glorious crown of all. With what joy, pride and satisfaction He praises His Mother before the whole court of Heaven, and then places the crown gently on her brow, as all in Heaven proclaim her their Queen and Mother. Then He goes on to explain to her, with great love and tenderness, in the sight of all, the special privileges which are hers alone and the oceans of Graces that are hers to distribute to souls as she pleases.