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Blame Mary for the role of women in church today

Isabella R. Moyer | May. 7, 2012 NCR Today

Blame Mary for the belief that women, as natural nurturers, are best suited for home life, caring full-time for children and husbands. Blame Mary for promoting the perfect religious woman as a humble, obedient handmaiden. Blame Mary for giving generations of young girls an impossible paradigm of motherhood while remaining chaste and virginal spouses. Blame Mary for rationalizing the male-only priesthood. She, who is the holiest and most exalted of all humans, was not a priest. Therefore, women should strive for holiness, not ordination. Blame Mary.

Or, more correctly, blame those who continue to perpetuate the Mariology of the past.

Many of us were raised with the image of Mary, meek and mild. Our homes and churches were filled with pictures and statues of an incredibly beautiful, young woman; head tilted modestly, in a humble posture of acquiescence or looking down on us with pity. The pity was for us poor, miserable children of Eve.

Modern Mariology looks to the scriptures to seek Mary. Here, we find a woman who is a model for all women and men who seek to follow her son.

Mary is a woman who ponders and prays. Because she is grounded in prayer, she is open to God's will even when it seems impossible. She says Yes in the midst of uncertainty, but not before asking "how can this be?"

Mary is a woman of compassion, who reaches out to Elizabeth in her own need.

Mary is the woman of the Magnificat, praising God while crying out for justice and peace for all God's oppressed. Humble handmaidens do not cry out that the mighty be dethroned and the poor be raised.

Mary is a wife and mother who knows the fear of exile, the hardship of a refugee, the heartache and worries of raising a child.

Mary is the guest who recognizes a need and seeks creative solutions. "They have no wine."

Mary is the woman of sorrow who watches her son suffer the death of a common criminal. When others have fled in fear, she remains standing at the foot of the cross.

Mary journeys with the disciples through the joys of Easter, the uncertainty of the ascension, and joins them in the upper room to allay their fears and nudge them to prayer. She is present when the Holy Spirit bursts into ordinary minds and hearts, gifting them with voice and courage to proclaim the good news to the ends of the earth.

In this month of May, we will pray rosaries, sing her glories and lay flowers at her feet. We should also revisit this woman of the Gospels, for in her, we will find a model of discipleship for us all.

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