



Mary Kept Faith after the Death of Jesus

By Pope John Paul II

After Jesus had been laid in the tomb, Mary "alone remains to keep alive the flame of faith, preparing to receive the joyful and astonishing announcement of the Resurrection."¹

The expectation felt on Holy Saturday is one of the loftiest moments of faith for the Mother of the Lord. In the darkness that envelops the world, she entrusts herself fully to the God of life, and thinking back to the words of her Son, she hopes in the fulfillment of the divine promises.

The Gospels mention various appearances of the Risen Christ, but not a meeting between Jesus and his Mother. This silence must not lead to the conclusion that after the Resurrection Christ did not appear to Mary. Rather it invites us to seek the reasons why the Evangelists made such a choice.

On the supposition of an "omission" this silence could be attributed to the fact that what is necessary for our saving knowledge was entrusted to the word of those "chosen by God as witnesses" (Acts 10:41), that is, the Apostles, who gave their testimony of the Lord Jesus' Resurrection "with great power" (cf. Acts 4:33). Before appearing to them, the Risen One had appeared to several faithful women because of their ecclesial function: "Go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me" (Mt 28:10).

If the authors of the New Testament do not speak of the Mother's encounter with her risen Son, this can perhaps be attributed to the fact that such a witness would have been considered too biased by those who denied the Lord's Resurrection, and therefore not worthy of belief.

Furthermore, the Gospels report a small number of appearances by the Risen Jesus and certainly not a complete summary of all that happened during the forty days after Easter. St. Paul recalls that He appeared "to more than 500 brethren at one time" (1 Cor 15:6). How do we explain the fact that an exceptional event known to so many is not mentioned by the Evangelists? It is an obvious sign that other appearances of the Risen One were not recorded, although they were among the well known events that occurred.

How could the Blessed Virgin, present in the first community of disciples (cf. Acts 1:14), be excluded from those who met her divine Son after He had risen from the dead?

Indeed, it is legitimate to think that the Mother was probably the first person to whom the Risen Jesus appeared. Could not Mary's absence from the group of women who went to the tomb at dawn (cf. Mk 16:1, Mt 28:1) indicate that she had already met Jesus? This inference would also be confirmed by the fact that the first witnesses of the Resurrection, by Jesus' will, were the women who had remained faithful at the foot of the Cross and therefore were more steadfast in faith.

Indeed, the Risen One entrusts to one of them, Mary Magdalene, the message to be passed on to the Apostles (cf. Jn 20:17-18). Perhaps this fact too, allows us to think that Jesus showed himself first to his Mother, who had been the most faithful and had kept her faith intact when put to the test.

Lastly, the unique and special character of the Blessed Virgin's presence at Calvary and her perfect union with the

Son in his suffering on the Cross seem to postulate a very particular sharing on her part in the mystery of the Resurrection.

A fifth-century author, Sedulius, maintains that in the splendor of his risen life Christ first showed himself to his mother. In fact, she, who at the Annunciation was the way He entered the world, was called to spread the marvellous news of the Resurrection in order to become the herald of his glorious coming. Thus bathed in the glory of the Risen One, she anticipates the Church's splendor.²

It seems reasonable to think that Mary, as the image and model of the Church which waits for the Risen One and meets Him in the group of disciples during his Easter appearances, had a personal contact with her risen Son so that she too could delight in the fullness of paschal joy.

Present at Calvary on Good Friday (cf. Jn 19:25) and in the Upper Room on Pentecost (cf. Acts 1:14), the Blessed Virgin too, was probably a privileged witness of Christ's Resurrection, completing in this way her participation in all the essential moments of the paschal mystery. Welcoming the Risen Jesus, Mary is also a sign and an anticipation of humanity, which hopes to achieve its fulfillment through the resurrection of the

dead.

In the Easter season, the Christian community addresses the Mother of the Lord and invites her to rejoice: "*Regina Caeli, laetare. Alleluia!*" "Queen of heaven, rejoice. Alleluia!" Thus it recalls Mary's joy at Jesus' Resurrection, prolonging in time the "rejoice" that the angel addressed to her at the Annunciation, so that she might become a cause of "great joy" for all people.

Excerpted from the Holy Father's address during his General Audience, May 21, 1997. Reprinted from the English edition *L'Osservatore Romano*, May 28, 1997.

1. Address at the General Audience, April 3, 1996; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, April 10, 1996, p. 7.

2. Cf. Sedulius, *Paschale Carmen*, 5, 357-364, CSEL 10, 140f.

Easter

The English term, according to the Ven. Bede (*De temporum ratione*, I, v), relates to Estre, a Teutonic goddess of the rising light of day and spring, which deity, however, is otherwise unknown, even in the Edda (Simrock, *Mythol.*, 362); Anglo-Saxon, *eāster*, *eāstron*; Old High German, *ōstra*, *ōstrara*, *ōstrarūn*; German, *Ostern*. April was called *easter-monadh*. The plural *eāstron* is used, because the feast lasts seven days. Like the French plural *Pâques*, it is a translation from the Latin *Festa Paschalia*, the entire octave of Easter. The Greek term for Easter, *pascha*, has nothing in common with the verb *paschein*, "to suffer," although by the later symbolic writers it was connected with it; it is the Aramaic form of the Hebrew *pesach* (*transitus*, passover). The Greeks called Easter the *pascha anastasimon*; Good Friday the *pascha staurosimon*. The respective terms used by the Latins are *Pascha resurrectionis* and *Pascha crucifixionis*. In the Roman and Monastic Breviaries the feast bears the title *Dominica Resurrectionis*; in the Mozarabic Breviary, *In Lætatione Diei Pasch Resurrectionis*; in the Ambrosian Breviary, *In Die Sancto Paschæ*. The Romance languages have adopted the Hebrew-Greek term: Latin, *Pascha*; Italian, *Pasqua*; Spanish, *Pascua*; French, *Pâques*. Also some Celtic and Teutonic nations use it: Scottish, *Pask*; Dutch, *Paschen*; The correct word in Dutch is actually *Pasen* Danish, *Paaske*; Swedish, *Pask*; even in the German provinces of the Lower Rhine the people call the feast *Paisken* not *Ostern*. The word is, principally in Spain and Italy, identified with the word "solemnity" and extended to other feasts, e.g. Sp., *Pascua florida*, Palm Sunday; *Pascua de Pentecostes*, Pentecost; *Pascua de la Natividad*, Christmas; *Pascua de Epifania*, Epiphany. In some parts of France also First Communion is called *Pâques*, whatever time of the year administered.

Easter n.

[AS. *eāstre*, pl. *eāstron*) (akin to G. *ostern*) fr. name of old Teut. goddess of spring, AS. *Eāstre*; akin to SKR. *ustā* dawn, and E. EAST]