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DAY 5

Mary's Trial of Faith

Just as Abraham's pilgrimage of faith met its ultimate test when he was called to sacrifice Isaac, so Mary's pilgrimage of faith met a similar test. However, while Abraham ultimately did not have to go through with the sacrifice, Mary had to watch and be present during the torture and slaughter of her dearly beloved Son all the way to its agonizing end. She had to stand and consent to the immolation of the victim. She had to remain there in faith, hoping against hope.

It was there on Calvary, there at the foot of the Cross, that we find in Mary the glorious perfection of faith. It was there, in the midst of the most terrible darkness, that we paradoxically see the luminous blessing of Elizabeth shine forth with ever greater glory: "Blessed is she who believed that what was spoken to her by the Lord would be fulfilled!"

Yes, blessed is she who believed at the foot of the Cross. Blessed is she who believed in the impossible. Blessed is she who believed "that God was able to raise men even from the dead" (Heb 11:19). That is faith. Again, that is the glorious perfection of faith. That is the greatest light of faith, which shines amid the deepest darkness.

Now, ponder once again the words of the angel that Our Lady believed regarding her Son, Jesus: He will be great ... and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end (Lk 1:32-33).

And now, reflect on St. John Paul II's reaction to and commentary on those words in view of Mary's ultimate trial of faith: Standing at the foot of the Cross, Mary is the witness, humanly speaking, of the complete negation of these words.

On the wood of the Cross her Son hangs in agony as one condemned. "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows ... he was despised, and we esteemed him not": as one destroyed (cf. Is 53:3-5). How great, how heroic then is the obedience of faith shown by Mary in the face of God's "unsearchable judgments!" How completely she "abandons herself to God" without reserve, "offering the full assent of the intellect and the will" to him whose "ways are inscrutable" (cf. Rom 11:33)! And how powerful too is the action of grace in her soul, how all-pervading is the influence of the Holy Spirit and of his light and power!

Wow. That's a lot of exclamation marks from a pope. Three in a row! Why all the enthusiasm? It's because, again, we've arrived at the perfection of faith. We've arrived at the moment when we see "how great, how heroic" is Mary's faith, the moment when we see "how completely she 'abandons herself to God' without reserve." We've arrived at the moment when Elizabeth's words of blessing, as John Paul puts it, "seem to re-echo with supreme eloquence, and the power contained within them becomes something penetrating." And it's probably becoming clear now as to why that blessing penetrates. It penetrates because we need that blessing.

All of us will go through times when our faith is severely tested. We'll experience times of excruciating darkness and even agony, and we'll wonder, "Where is God?" We'll not understand his ways. We'll feel as if all is lost, that God no longer loves us, that he has abandoned us. And then we'll remember — I hope we'll remember — Mary's example of faith at the foot of the Cross. We'll recall that she, too, did not fully understand. She, too, stood in darkness. She, too, had a heart that was bleeding and broken. We'll also

remember that she didn't give in to the darkness, that she clung to God with the light of faith.

And then — I hope — we'll remember the blessing. We'll remember Elizabeth's words: "Blessed is she who believed that what was spoken to her by the Lord would be fulfilled." And I hope that "the power contained within [that blessing] will become something penetrating" for us. In other words, I hope we'll see how Elizabeth's blessing can apply to us, that the following words can be spoken to us: "Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

And what was spoken to us? What's the word of the Lord for us? It's the word of the Cross. It's the word of love spoken through Christ's death on the Cross, the word of love that Mary intimately shared in on Calvary. It's the word from Scripture:

"Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13). It's the truth that God loves us, that God loves you, no matter what. I hope that by holding on in faith to that greatest expression of love in the midst of our own trials and darkness, we'll find peace, and even joy — and maybe even sing a song of praise. We'll talk about Mary's song of faith and praise tomorrow.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy.

Help me to believe in God and his love for me,
even when the darkness surrounds me.

From St Hannibal's Introduction to the "Twenty-Four Hours of the Passion of Our Lord, Jesus Christ!"

"...we must consider another extreme of so much infinite love in the sorrowful and scandalous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ: an extreme that is like a final blow shattering the coldness or hardness that is in our hearts, chaining us totally to the love of the everlasting, Divine Lover of souls: an extreme that though it may not suffice to move us, suffices to make us guilty of the most wicked cruelty and hurl us down the slope of perdition!

This extreme is the observation that all that Christ Our Lord suffered for was for the love and salvation of all human generations, that is, of a never-ending number of souls, He suffered equally for each individual soul! This means that if only one soul had existed in the world, Our Lord Jesus Christ would have done and endured all that He did and endured for the Redemption of all of humanity! Which means, my dear reader, that if your soul had been the only soul that needed to be saved, the Son of God would have come down to earth from Heaven for you alone, and would have become incarnate, taking on a passible body, would have suffered for thirty-four years without a moment's respite, in Body and Soul, and for you alone would have given Himself over to pain, humiliation, agony, flogging, thorns, the Cross, and death! Yes, that's how it is! Because it shall always be true that Our Lord Jesus Christ loves one soul as much as He loves all present, past and future souls taken all together!

How could anyone remain indifferent before this infinite Charity?