

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

October 6, 2013

Spiritual Ponderings

Mariology

It has been my custom to devote my Spiritual Ponderings for the month of October to our Blessed Mother and in the past I have searched out images of the Blessed Virgin Mary and from there drew my inspiration for my weekly columns. This year, I am sort of doing this process in reverse. Instead of starting with the image, I am instead starting with the writings of Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan about the Blessed Mother and then I found an image that I believed speaks to what the Cardinal wrote. Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan was a Vietnamese bishop during the time of the Vietnam War. He was known for his youth and his zeal. He taught in the diocesan seminary, visited the sick, and ran Catholic Relief Services for the entire country. When the North won the war, he was arrested and the Vatican presumed he was dead. He was unfortunately not dead but was instead in a concentration camp in solitary confinement. For nine years, the only person, he saw was his interrogator, who was unable to break Cardinal Thuan despite their horrible methods. He was eventually placed under house arrest in northern Vietnam. There he was able to make friends with a few of the people and he began to write a book of exhortations on the back of old calendars. His friends smuggled his manuscript out and it was eventually published in a book called: *The Road of Hope: A Gospel from Prison*. Many years later he was eventually released and exiled from Vietnam. The Church welcomed him back and Pope John Paul II made him the head of the Congregation for Peace and Justice. Cardinal Thuan has passed away and I expect one day will be canonized. In his book *The Road of Hope: A Gospel from Prison* he had a chapter on the Blessed Virgin Mary and so for the month of October I would like to reflect on some of his sayings about the Blessed Virgin Mary. You will find the quotes from his book in bold and my reflection in regular font.

913 “Here is your Mother” (Jn 19:27). After the institution of the Blessed Eucharist, the Lord could not have left us anything greater than Mary. She has crushed the head of the serpent. She will help you to conquer the devil, “the flesh” and “the world.” She will obtain for you the graces to hold firm to the noble ideal which the Lord has placed in your heart.



One of the greatest gifts that I have received in my life as a priest has been the opportunity to be a part of other people's families. One family in a special way has made me a part of their family as no other family has by giving me a key to their house and asking me to be the godfather of their youngest child. It is a unique gift that I treasure greatly. Jesus invites me to be more than just a friend. He invites me to be an adoptive brother with His Father as my Father and His mother as my mother. I can think of no more awesome gift. I know too that this adoption did not come cheaply for my life was purchased by the Blood of Jesus on the Cross. Even when Jesus was suffering the most He was thinking of you and me.

914 No matter how tepid, sinful, or hopeless you may feel, entrust yourself into the hands of Mary. Jesus bequeathed her to you; how could she abandon you?

I loved my grandmother so much and I was devastated when she died. Her death though was not the end of her influence on me for I still strive today to be a grandchild that she would be proud of. How could Mary not want to take care of us as her own for we were the last gift she received from her Son before His death?

915 When you fall, weep humbly with her, because sin caused the death of her Son. She will receive you. She accepted the good thief as much as John. She will also accept you as her child.

Mary is the primary role model for us Christians because she truly opens us up to what it means to be a disciple. Jesus taught us that the Father was unconditional love and so Mary lives a life of unconditional love. Jesus teaches us to trust the Father. Mary demonstrates this trust by cooperating with God's plan even in times of sorrow.



Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

October 13, 2013

Spiritual Ponderings

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As we continue to look at Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan's spiritual insights into the Blessed Virgin Mary by looking at quotes from his book called: *The Road of Hope: A Gospel from Prison*, I invite you to take this time to start a relationship with the Blessed Virgin or to deepen your relationship with her by seeing her as the ideal disciple of Jesus. Just a reminder quotes from the Cardinal's book will be in bold.

Today's image is called Our Lady of the Rosary and it depicts Mary holding a rosary as if she wishes to give it to you. The rosary has been one of the most fundamental prayers of the Church for centuries. Like Jesus Christ the rosary has a twofold dimension. On one level the rosary is a recitation of a group of formal prayers in a precise order and on the second level the rosary is a guided meditation on the different parts of the life of Jesus and His most perfect disciple who at the same time happens to be His mother.



920 The life of Mary is summed up in three words: Ecce, Fiat, and Maginificat.

With spiritual fervor, impressed them on your heart, ponder them, and act on them:

“Behold the handmaid of the Lord,” Ecce. “Let it be done to me according to your word,” Fiat (Lk 1:38). “My souls give praise to the Lord,” Maginificat (Lk 1:46)

Probably the hardest thing about being a Christian is to realize that it is only in realizing that we were created for a purpose and that we will only find true freedom by fulfilling our purpose. There is so much talk out there about discovering one's own destiny, finding one's own path, and living one's life on one's own terms; such attitudes though do not lead to freedom but rather to slavery to possessions and addictions because when we make things or people the purpose of our life we have to spend our time defending them instead of being free to live the life we are called to live. Mary recognizes from the beginning that nothing she has is really hers but rather all is a gift from God. Mary must have seen how different this God that she worshipped was different from other gods and goddesses because this God, though He had the power to force Himself upon her, invites her to be a part of His plan. She knows who she is – “ecce”, she knows that true happiness comes from doing the will of God – “fiat” and she thanks God – “magnificat” that God would care about her. How can we make these three words the center of our life? Ecce – realize that everything we have is from the Father. Fiat – realize that God wants what is best for us. Magnificat – realize that God freely loves us and desires us to be a part of his family.

916 Mary is like a popular, pocket-sized, living book of the Gospels, which is more readily accessible to you than the lives of all the saints.

If you were a person who wanted to be a baseball player, you would eventually have to become fascinated with baseball players who were considered great like Stan “the Man” Musial. In much the same way Mary should be a role model for all of us.

918 If you wish to become a saint, be childlike. A child does not understand theory, but he watches his mother and follows her example. He believes that his mother knows everything and does everything correctly. So look at your Mother Mary: imitate her and you will become a saint.

It has become really cool and amazing for me to watch my little nieces and nephews grow up and see how they desire to imitate those whom they think is cool. Sometimes we can make faith too complicated. Mary shows us in some concrete ways what it means to be a disciple. First be open to God's will, second ponder what is going on in your heart, and finally “do whatever he (Jesus) tells you. We can also add be close to the Cross, when we feel like Christ is lost to go in search of Him and finally to not expect an easy life.



Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

October 20, 2013

Spiritual Ponderings

Mariology

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary is a devotion that spreads throughout the Church and in every language. This month we have been looking at a Vietnamese bishop's Marian spiritual insights. Let us continue our look at Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan's spiritual insights into the Blessed Virgin Mary by looking at quotes from his book called: *The Road of Hope: A Gospel from Prison*.

This week's image is an image of the Holy Family hanging out together. We can see Mary is doing some sewing and Jesus is handing His stepfather Joseph a tool as Joseph builds something.

926 Mary gives us an example of a modest and secluded life. Yet, she was always accessible to others. She kept a low profile, living quietly in the background, but always for Jesus. Do you live wholly for the Lord who lives in you?

Pride is the most dangerous sin because most of us will do or say anything to attract attention and most of the time we do not care if the attention we get is good or bad just as long as we get the attention we desire. Mary though has no need to be prideful or to act in such a way to draw attention to herself. She is firmly rooted in her identity as the mother of Jesus and beloved daughter of the Father. How many sins could we avoid if we were firmly rooted in our identity as being beloved sons and daughters of the Father? We are just that because in Baptism our God adopted us. Can we be content with our roles in life simply knowing that God loves us unconditionally?



928 During the most glorious events of our Lord's public life—his transfiguration on Mount Tabor and his entry into Jerusalem—Mary remained hidden. But at times of gravest danger—the flight into Egypt, the way of the cross to Calvary, her sorrowful watch at the foot of the cross, and her vigil in the upper room with the apostles—Mary courageously chose to be present. She did not live for herself, but only for the Lord and his work of redemption.

It is easy to be friends with someone in good times and it is much different to be friends with someone in bad times. I think the true test of a friendship or for love that matter is for a person to sacrifice by being present when they would rather not. Mary shows this throughout her life by being near her Son in His difficult moments. As I am thinking about this the following verse from St. Paul's 1st Letter to the Corinthians has come to mind: "Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts. But I shall show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, (love) is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. (1 Corinthians 12:31-13:8a).

936 Mary lived completely for Jesus. Her mission was to share in his work of Redemption. All her honor derives from him. If it were not for the fact that her Son is the Lord Jesus Christ, and that her whole life was lived for him, Mary would be nothing at all. Likewise, your own life will amount to nothing at all if you separate yourself from Jesus.

No matter what we accomplish in life because we cannot take it with us. We are nothing without Jesus.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius
October 27, 2013
Spiritual Ponderings
Mariology

As we come to the end of the month of October and the end of our reflections on the Blessed Virgin Mary, I would like to present to you the following picture of the Visitation. Mary filled with Jesus in her womb sets off in haste to serve her now pregnant elderly cousin. What a beautiful image of the Mass for when we receive Jesus we are sent out to bring Him to the World through serving others.

We also have three more spiritual insights from Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan's book called: *The Road of Hope: A Gospel from Prison*.

948 Mary was not only concerned for the Lord, but also for Elizabeth, John, and the couple at Cana. Imitate Mary's attitude; have consideration for our Lord, but also for your neighbor.

As I have developed friendship with people, I have come to appreciate the things that are important to them. The more important an item is to my friend and the stronger the friendship the more important that item becomes to me. Jesus has shown us that what is important to Him is us. He would rather die than to live without us. Therefore if I am a friend of Jesus, others will become important to me. Mary shows a deep concern for others and is an example for us.



Mary lived out the Law of Love at all times and saw the connection between love of God, love of neighbor, and love of self and how they had to be rooted in God who is love. Mary was never a noising gong drawing attention to herself but rather she always directed people to Jesus.

929 Mary joined in prayer with the apostles, preparing herself and assisting them for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Thus she prepared for and witnessed the day of the public inauguration the Church. In giving birth to the Lord Jesus, she gave birth to his body, the Church. Truly, she is Mother of the Church.

I think unfortunately one of the sinful tendencies that many people have is to underestimate the power of prayer. Mary is a prime example of someone who prayed often. She pondered the things and events of life in her heart. Always trying to discern God's will for her and her Son. By being open to the Holy Spirit she became the Mother of God.

933 Mary's total sacrifice was ennobled because of her complete trust in God. Contrary to the custom of her time, she vowed to remain a virgin. God, however, bestowed on her the gifts of the virgin motherhood and of being the mother of God and the Mother of all people.

We get ourselves into more trouble trying to play God and we delude ourselves into thinking that we are in control. Mary's life was not a life of delusion for she knew that she was not in control. She lived in the reality that the loving God of Israel was in charge.

With God nothing is impossible.
