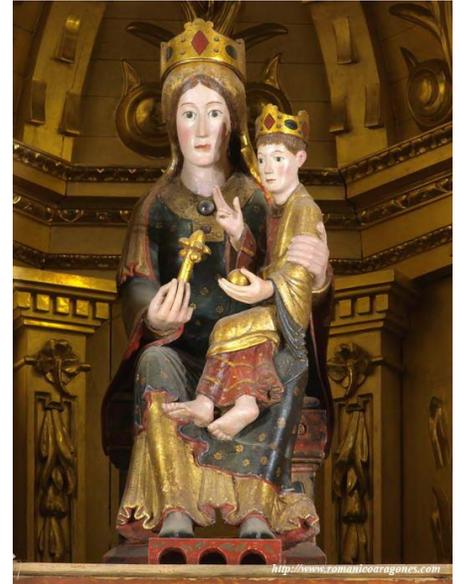


Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius
October 2, 2016
Spiritual Ponderings
Images of Blessed Virgin Mary

I believe since the very beginning of my Spiritual Ponderings, I have always devoted the month of October to exploring different images of the Blessed Virgin Mary. I invite you to check out my website www.mayjesuschristbepraised to see past reflections. Along most of this spiritual journey, I have been assisted by Ann Ball and her book: *The Other Faces Of Mary: Stories, Devotions and Pictures of the Holy Virgin Around the World*.

Our first image this month is called Santa Maria la Real de Najera. This image of Mary is a common image of the Blessed Virgin found on the great pilgrim route known as the El Camino which was made famous a few years ago by a movie called *The Way* that starred Martin Sheen and was directed by his son Emilio Estevez. The ultimate destination of the El Camino is the great church of St. James in Santiago Compostela.

According to legend there was a young king who went out hunting with his falcon and upon spotting a partridge he released his falcon to hunt its prey. The falcon did not return right away and so the king went off looking for it. He discovered the falcon and partridge both standing in a cave before a byzantine style carved statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The king, according to legend also discovered a vase filled with freshly cut lilies. Later that year the king successfully retook the land of Cohorra from the Muslims. He attributed his victory to the special image of the Blessed Virgin Mary and had a monastery built upon the cave where the image was found and he created a special order of knights in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This order in addition fighting to keep Christians safe also took an oath to attend Mass every Saturday.



The image of Santa Maria la Real de Najera presents Mary as an enthroned queen holding her grown Child Jesus who is seated on her knees. The Christ-child figure hands are carved in a way that makes it look like he is offering a blessing to all who are passing by.

As I reflect on this image of the Blessed Virgin Mary and on the legend that accompanies it, I am drawn first to the story of the hunting falcon and the partridge being found together in front of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It reminds me of the Scripture passage from Isaiah about the Lord's Holy Mountain: "And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. They will not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea." Isaiah 11: 6-9. The image of the hunter and the prey sitting together is a great image that invokes peace.

The fact that a monastery is built upon the location is even more poetic if you think of it as the people building their life of prayer that comes from honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary the Queen of Peace. The Blessed Virgin Mary can be referred to as the queen of peace for many reasons. The first is that she gives us Jesus the Prince of Peace. This Jesus that we receive from her is the same Jesus who instead of destroying us chose to offer us peace. Jesus, the leader of an army of angels, instead of sending them into the world to destroy the world, he sends them to a group of shepherds to proclaim the Good News of the Incarnation. The second reason the Blessed Virgin Mary can be called the Queen of Peace is that she shows us that following Jesus in good times and in bad brings about a sense of peace that our circumstances cannot take away from us. The third reason is that the Blessed Virgin Mary reminds us that our God is not a God who enforces His will upon us but rather He is a God who invites us, His creatures to be a part of His divine plan. God did not send Gabriel to intimidate Mary into saying "yes" like a mob boss sending a goon to make Mary an

“offer she can’t refuse.” Instead Gabriel asks and invites Mary to say “yes” to God’s plan. In the same way God does not force Himself on us but rather he invites us to participate in His divine plan for us.

PRAYER TO THE IMMACULATE QUEEN OF PEACE

Most holy and immaculate Virgin, Mother of Jesus and our loving Mother, being his Mother, you shared in His universal kingship. The prophets and angels proclaimed Him King of peace. With loving fervor in our hearts we salute and honor you as Queen of peace. We pray that your intercession may protect us and all people from hate and discord, and direct our hearts into the ways of peace and justice which your Son taught and exemplified. We ask your maternal care for our Holy Father who works to reconcile the nations in peace. We seek your guidance for our Head of State and other Leaders as they strive for world peace.

Glorious Queen of peace, grant us peace in our hearts, harmony in our families and concord throughout the world. Immaculate Mother, as patroness of our beloved country, watch over us and protect us with your motherly love. Amen.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius
October 9, 2016
Spiritual Ponderings
Images of Blessed Virgin Mary

“From Mary we learn to surrender to God's Will in all things. From Mary we learn to trust even when all hope seems gone. From Mary we learn to love Christ her Son and the Son of God!” - Saint John Paul II.

As we continue to explore the different aspects of the Blessed Virgin Mary’s life as the Mother of God, our Mother in heaven, and the ultimate model of what it means to be a disciple, we come upon our next image mentioned in Ann Ball’s book: *The Other Faces Of Mary: Stories, Devotions and Pictures of the Holy Virgin Around the World*. This next image of Mary is called Our Lady of Ladyewell. The images and devotions surround this image of the Blessed Virgin Mary are a development from the title of Mary as “Our Lady of Martyrs” for there is a statue of this image of the Blessed Virgin Mary in England that is surrounded by relics from many different English Martyrs.

The shrine immediately became a popular destination for pilgrims in England when Catholicism became illegal thanks to laws promulgated by Henry VIII. While many Catholics were martyred for their faith, others were simply fined heavy fines and even had to suffer the loss of their land as a result of their refusal to convert to Protestantism. These poor farmers and peasants would often turn to Our Lady of Ladyewell for help. Even today, Our Lady of Ladyewell is known as a great pilgrim destination from May to October.

As I reflect over the image of Our Lady of Ladyewell, I cannot help but begin to think of some of my favorite Catholic Saints. These saints are often referred to as a group as the English Martyrs and include St. John Fisher, St. Thomas More, and St. Edmund Campion. All St. John Fisher had to do was recognize King Henry VIII’s divorce and he would not only have gone free but probably would have received a place of honor in King Henry VIII’s new Church. Instead Bishop Fisher was martyred. St. Thomas More was a very high political official in the English government and he gave them all up in order to remain a man on integrity and a faithful Catholic. St. Thomas More could not imagine being a part of a Church that did not also have the Sacraments. St. Edmund Campion was a young man who under Queen Elizabeth was being groomed to be the Archbishop of Canterbury. He could not reconcile his studies of the early Church fathers with what the Protestants were teaching and so he left England to become a Catholic Priest (A Jesuit). He would later return to England to serve his fellow countrymen as a Catholic priest. Eventually he was caught and executed for treason simply because he was a Catholic priest. As I reflect upon their lives and the lives of other who live their faith under persecution, I am reminded about how blest that I currently am.



Reflecting on the English Martyrs and this image of Our Lady of Ladyewell also makes me realize that the Blessed Virgin Mary did not have an easy life either. There were many moments of great sorrow in Mary’s life. There is even a

devotion to the seven major sorrows of the Blessed Virgin's Life. (1)The prophecy of Simeon - Luke 2:34, 35 (2) The flight into Egypt - Matthew 2:13, 14 (3) The loss of the Child Jesus in the temple - Luke 2: 43-45 (4) The meeting of Jesus and Mary on the Way of the Cross. (5)The Crucifixion (6)The taking down of the Body of Jesus from the Cross. & (7) The burial of Jesus.

Reflecting upon this idea a little deeper, I realize that the Blessed Virgin Mary gave up a comfortable, ordinary, average life in Nazareth to become the Mother of God. If she had only married Joseph and had not become the Mother of God she would not have had to flee to Egypt to escape Herod, listen to Simeon and Anna predict her child's death, see her son Crucified, etc. Each day though Mary recommitted herself to her "yes" to be the Mother of God. She never ran away from her responsibilities to Jesus or did she ever disowned Him.

Are we ready to follow the Blessed Virgin Mary's example and say "yes" to God each and every day of our lives even if we know that our "yes" may result in us having to suffer for our faith?

Mary, Queen of Martyrs, Prayer

Opening Prayer:

Mary, most holy Virgin and Queen of Martyrs, accept the sincere homage of my filial affection. Into your heart, pierced by so many swords, you welcome my poor soul. Receive it as the companion of your sorrows at the foot of the Cross on which Jesus died for the redemption of the world. With you, O sorrowful Virgin, I will gladly suffer all the trials, contradictions, and infirmities which it shall please our Lord to send me. I offer them all to you in memory of your sorrows, so that every thought of my mind and every beat of my heart may be an act of compassion and of love for you. Sweet mother, have pity on me, reconcile me to your divine Son, Jesus; keep me in his grace and assist me in my last agony, so that I may be able to meet you in heaven and to sing your glories. Amen.

Meditation:

In God's presence consider... When I am in anguish, especially over the suffering of a loved one, does it comfort me to know that Mary can fully sympathize with my pain, and pray for me accordingly?

Closing Prayer:

Where can I flee for more secure shelter, amiable mother of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, than under the wings of your maternal protection

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

October 16, 2016

Spiritual Ponderings

Images of Blessed Virgin Mary

St. John Vianney once wrote: "Only after the Last Judgment will Mary get any rest; from now until then, she is much too busy with her children." A true mother loves all her children and while the relationship between mother and child may change over the years the love that a good mother has never diminishes. This made most evident in our next image of the Blessed Virgin Mary from Ann Ball's book: *The Other Faces Of Mary: Stories, Devotions and Pictures of the Holy Virgin around the World*. This image has been entitled: Our Lady of Montligeon and in its original form it was a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary lifting souls out of the fires of purgatory and placing them into the heavens.

"Yes" we Catholics still believe in Purgatory. The doctrine of purgatory simply states that there is a place/time after death where a person receives a final cleansing or purifying (often depicted as fire) of our desire to sin and/or our love of sin is removed from us. Since I am a visual person, I like to think of purgatory as a sort of drug rehab center for sinners. In a drug rehab center, I have to go through



withdraws of getting the drug out of my system and even though it is for my own benefit it is a painful process but I cannot be healed until the drugs are out of my system. Spiritually, I have to get rid of my desire to sin before I can enter God's loving presence forever. As an ex-drug user learns healthier ways to deal with the situations in his or her life; a sinner learns how to forgive instead of holding grudges. A sinner has to learn how handle temptation without sinning. In the same way that a person in a drug rehab center can receive encouragement from family and friends through letters and phone calls a person in purgatory can receive encouragement through prayers of both the living (us) and the dead (Mary and the Saints).

The Blessed Virgin Mary are extra special because Mary's prayers would be like receiving a prayer from our own mother, someone famous, and someone in great authority for she is also the Queen of Heaven. Her words to us are the same words of encouragements that she gave to the servants at the Wedding Feast of Cana – "Do whatever he tells you!" We would do well to follow this advice.

I think it also important to point out that love is what changes us in Purgatory the more we come to grasp how much God loves us the less desire we have to commit sin. Our Lady of Montligeon should also remind us that the dead are connected to us through the Church and the Communion of Saints. We should trust in their prayers for us and we should help them with our prayers.

"Even while living in this world, the heart of Mary was so filled with tenderness and compassion for men, that no one ever suffered so much for his own pains as Mary suffered for the pains of others." - Saint Jerome~

Our Lady of Montligeon Prayer:

Our Lady Liberty, have mercy on all our departed loved ones, especially on those who are most in need of the Lord's mercy. Intercede for those who have gone before us that the purifying love of God may lead them to full deliverance. May our prayer, united with the prayer of the whole Church, obtain for them a joy beyond all their desires, and bring consolation and relief to our loved ones in their suffering and distress. Mother of the Church, help us, pilgrims on earth, the better to live each day our journey towards the Resurrection. Heal our wounds of heart and soul. Help us to become witnesses of the Unseen God, seeking already the things that the eye cannot see. Grant us the grace of becoming apostles of Hope, like watchmen waiting for the dawn. Refuge of sinners and Queen of all Saints gather us all one day, in Our Father's House, or the eternal Easter, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

October 23, 2016

Spiritual Ponderings

Images of Blessed Virgin Mary

"The devotions we practice in honor of the glorious Virgin Mary, however trifling they may be, are very pleasing to Her Divine Son, and He rewards them with eternal glory." - Saint Teresa of Avila. Our next image of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a very strange image. It is called the "Virgin with Three Hands". Remember that much of the information about these images of Blessed Virgin Mary can be found in Ann Ball's book: *The Other Faces Of Mary: Stories, Devotions and Pictures of the Holy Virgin around the World*.

In the Eastern Catholic Church a great debate arose about the use of images (Icons) to depict Jesus and other holy figures. One side the Iconoclasts declared that it was sinful to make images depicting God because the Old Testament forbade it. St. John Damascene (a.k.a St. John Damascus) and others argued that it was not only permissible but good to create imaged depicting God because of the Incarnation. According to the legend surround the Icon of the Virgin Mary with Three Hands, John was known to be a great writer and a great orator and Leo the Isaurian, grew tired of being outdone by St. John. He therefore had someone write a letter to the Emperor



in a way that the Emperor would think that St. John had written it. St. John was convicted and had his right hand cut off as punishment. Not sure what to do next John went to a monastery and prayed before an Icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary asking her to restore his hand and when he woke up the next morning his hand had been restored. As a sign of his gratitude to the Blessed Virgin Mary, he had a copy of his hand placed in front of the image. Some historians say that he had his hand painted onto the icon. Eventually someone copied the image over again including St. John's arm as if it was a part of the original picture.

Virgin with Three Hands

Another ending of the story has the Emperor learning about John's hand being restored and realizes that St. John must have been innocent and therefore offers John different material things as an apology. John not wanting anything for himself asked for a copy of his arm to be made and placed before the image and from there someone incorporated it into the next image of the icon.

This image of the Blessed Virgin Mary with three hands reminds me that God can always bring good out of evil. I cannot imagine what John was thinking; when his hand was cut off because of Leo's treachery. His response was not one of despair but one of prayer. His faith was that strong. I hope that my faith is that strong.

The following are some other things that St. John Damascene says about the Blessed Virgin Mary.

(1)"Devotion to you, O Blessed Virgin, is a means of salvation which God gives to those whom he wishes to save." --Saint John Damascene

(2)"The day of the Nativity of the Mother of God is a day of universal joy, because through the Mother of God, the entire human race was renewed, and the sorrow of the first mother, Eve, was transformed into joy." --Saint John Damascene

In addition St. John wrote the following song which is song during the Liturgy of St. Basil:

*In thee, O full of grace, all creation rejoices:
the assembly of angels and the race of men.
O sanctified temple and spiritual paradise,
the glory of virgins, from whom God was incarnate
and became a child: our God before the ages.
He made thy body into a throne,
and thy womb he made more spacious than the heavens.
In thee, O full of grace, all creation rejoices.
Glory be to thee!*

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius
October 30, 2016
Spiritual Ponderings
Images of Blessed Virgin Mary

O sinner, be not discouraged, but have recourse to Mary in all you necessities. Call her to your assistance, for such is the divine Will that she should help in every kind of necessity. --Saint Basil the Great. We have another great image of the Blessed Virgin Mary from Ann Ball's book: *The Other Faces Of Mary: Stories, Devotions and Pictures of the Holy Virgin around the World*. This next image of the Blessed Virgin Mary comes from India and is called Our Lady of Velankanni (Our Lady of Good health).

This image of the Blessed Virgin Mary is unique for it one of two images of the Blessed Virgin Mary is wearing an Indian Sari. According to oral history, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to a young boy delivering milk to his neighbor. According to the legend Mary was holding the Christ child in her arms. Another miracle account says that the image of Blessed Virgin Mary saved two Portuguese



shipwrecked sailors.

While the Vatican has not approved this apparition, because of a lack of evidence, the Church has referred to Mary as "Our Lady of Good Health" for a long time. The reason why this title was given to the Blessed Virgin Mary was because she followed God's will completely and therefore did not run into the same problems that we do when reject God and try to do things our way. God does not punish us for rejecting Him but every time we turn away from God we will be hurt because we are turning away from love itself. God's punishment is like that of a man dying of dehydration in the desert despite having a canteen full of water. If he does not drink the water, it will do him no good. It is also similar to how a fire can burn someone not because the fire is mean but rather the person was not safe around it. Mary shows us how to live as healthy life as possible because she always did things God's way.

When thinking of Mary under the title of Our Lady of Good Health, it reminds me that doing things God's way may not prevent me from suffering from earthly sicknesses but ultimately I will receive eternal life and health in heaven.

Reflecting on the image again, I cannot help but appreciate the bright colors and the beautiful outfit that Mary and Jesus are wearing. These garments are meant to remind us of our royal dignity also as sons and daughters of God.

Prayer To Our Lady of Velankanni

Oh Most Holy Virgin! You were chosen by the Most Adorable Trinity from all eternity to be the most pure Mother of Jesus. Permit me, your humble and devoted servant, to remind you of the joy received in the instant of the Most Sacred Incarnation of our Divine Lord and during the nine months you carried Him in your chaste womb. I wish most sincerely that I could renew, or even increase that joy, by the fervor of my Prayers.

Oh! Tender Mother of the afflicted! Grant me under my present necessities that special protection You have promised to those who devoutly commemorate this ineffable joy. Relying on the infinite mercies of your Divine Son, trusting in the promise which He has made that those who ask should receive, and penetrated with confidence in your powerful prayers, I most humbly entreat you intercede for me. I beg you to obtain for me the favors which I petition for in this novena, if it be the Holy Will of God to grant them; to ask for me whatever graces I most stand in need of.

(Here specify your requests)

I desire by this prayer, which I now offer in your honor, to prove the lively confidence I have in your intercession. Accept it, I beseech you, in honor of that supernatural love and joy, with which your Immaculate Heart was replenished during the abode of your divine Son in your womb; in veneration of which, I offer you the sentiments of my heart.

Oh! Mother of God! accept these salutations in union with the respect and veneration with which the Angel Gabriel first hailed you, "Full of Grace" I wish most sincerely that they may become so many gems in the crown of your incidental glory, which will increase in brightness to the end of the world.

I beseech you, Oh! comfortress of the afflicted, by the joy you received, when the word was made flesh, to obtain for me the favors and graces, which I have now implored through your powerful intercession. For this end I offer you all the good works which have even been performed in your honor. I most humbly entreat you for the love of the amiable Heart of Jesus, with which yours was ever so inflamed, to hear my humble prayers and to obtain my requests.
- Amen.

