



LIGHT & LIFE

VOICE OF THE ROSARY CENTER & CONFRATERNITY

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Fr. Dismas Sayre, O.P., *Director* Jul-Aug 2023, Vol 76, No 4 Western Dominican Province

Pull, Mother, Pull

The story is told of an old lady who lay friendless and dying in the infirmary of the county poor farm. As she lay there looking up at the dull lifeless ceiling decorated here and there with a discolored patch of damp wallpaper, she was tempted to despair. All her good deeds of eighty-one years seemed useless for eternity; her sins were vivid and as real as living horrors about her bed. At that moment, she held up her rosary towards heaven and with a smile of helpfulness said to Our Lady: "Pull, Lady Mother, pull."

This wonderful little story highlights a few truths for us. First, no matter how we lived our lives, or how much good work we have done, when we spend too much time alone with our thoughts, as this old lady had on her deathbed, we are often prone to despair of some kind. Over and over, we replay in our mind our past sins and offenses, forgetting how good God is in offering us the Sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Confession for when we fail or fall. The Enemy is constant in reminding us of our past when we fell, and he continues to seek our fall until our last, dying breath in this vale of tears. Whatever you might think of the Enemy, he is *not* lazy.

Of course, we might then think that our friends in Heaven are somehow unemployed, spending eternity plucking strings on a harp. Where's our cheering section? Professional athletes and performers will sometimes take more note of those who jeer than those who cheer. It seems to be part of our human nature to focus on the negative. Nevertheless, the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that *"since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God. Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart."* (Hebrews 12:1-3) So yes, we might encounter opposition, but we most assuredly have our saintly friends on our side as well, our cheering section.

And, of course, like any good cheering section, our heavenly helpers are anchored by Our Mother. Perhaps

we dismiss her too easily; after all, she *is* Our Mother, and mothers are *supposed* to cheer us on, no matter how clumsy or unskilled we are. We forget, however, that she too ran the same race. She was not assumed into Heaven body and soul immediately after being conceived. She, too, lived a full earthly life. She, too, suffered, and she experienced the highs and lows that being the Mother of God and a faithful disciple of Christ entailed, along with all the other troubles



"The Assumption of the Virgin", Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, c.1660-70, Hermitage Museum, St.Petersburg

that come along with simply being human. So she is not ignorant of our struggles – she ran the race and fought the good fight before us.

Now we may likewise dismiss her prayers for us as a case of "love being blind." But love is not blind – not if it is *real* love. For she sees in us, as God the Father does, what she sees and loves in her Son. She loves God and loves

as God loves, and therefore *what* God loves. She is not content to leave us in the mire and depths of despair we might find ourselves in. As St. Jean-Marie Vianney said, *"Only after the Last Judgment will Mary get any rest; from now until then, she is much too busy with her children."*

In the meantime, she will continue to do what a good Mother does, and that is to make sure we too get safely home – to our heavenly home. She will plead, beg, and yes, perhaps even "pull," if necessary. ■

* Re-printed with gracious permission from St. Meinrad Archabbey, from *The Grail* magazine, circa 1950.

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TO BE OFFERED FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

The Anxious Mysteries

By Fr. Joseph Sergott, O.P.

Are *you* living the Anxious Mysteries?

You have never heard of the *Anxious Mysteries*. And yet, I'll bet you have probably lived them at one time or another in your life—perhaps even now.

The “Anxious Mysteries” is a term I have coined to refer to those times in our lives when we let fear and anxiety paralyze us. In these moments, instead of presenting our trials to God while seeking the help and peace that only he can give, we allow our own fears and anxiety to prevent us from living our faith, and sometimes even our life.

There is a sure antidote to the Anxious Mysteries in the *Joyful Mysteries* of the Rosary, Mary's indispensable prayer. In fact, juxtaposition of the two sets of mysteries reveals how one can lead to our ruin and the other to our salvation.

The Blessed Virgin Mary had much to be fearful and anxious about during her life on earth, and yet, her life was one of faith and joy. There were, however, enough events in her life where she found herself in a position where she could choose to succumb to fear and anxiety or entrust herself to God. Further, when it came time for her to enter into the Passion and death of her Son, she did not allow fear and anxiety to stop her—as it did to many people—but instead, it deepened Mary's initial understanding of the divine fiat and intensified her single-minded commitment to God.

The Annunciation

The First Anxious Mystery: The Burden of Responsibility

Fear and Anxiety: There can be overpowering fear and anxiety about accomplishing what God asks of us or fulfilling our obligations in life.

The KEY is to ask for God's help, to trust him, and then to accept the responsibilities of the life that we have been given.

Antidote: When we allow his grace to carry us, and accept his will for us, we will discover tremendous peace and joy.

Have you ever stopped to consider how the Annunciation unfolded? There are many beautiful paintings and frescoes of the Annunciation throughout history; but, imagine the Virgin Mary suddenly being confronted by an angel declaring to be from heaven, speaking on behalf of God to deliver a personal message. Any human being put in that situation would naturally be filled with fear and anxiety. In fact, the Angel Gabriel says to Mary, “*Do not be afraid.*” (Luke 1:30) He then proceeds to tell her that she has been chosen to be the Mother of the Son of God. Mary then answers, “*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.*” (Luke 1:38)

When we are confronted by God, or our own situation in life, we can allow fear and anxiety to grab hold of us and prevent us from “doing the right thing”; that is, fulfilling

our obligations to God, to our job, or to our families, loved ones, or other responsibilities in our lives.

Mary gives us the antidote: we are to accept God's will, our commitments, or the tasks at hand, and to entrust our life to God with all of its trials and burdens. At her acceptance of God's plan for her, she experiences the fruits of peace and joy and the knowledge that God's grace will sustain her going forward.

Fear is a gift of self-survival that comes from God. When our lives are threatened or we are in harm's way, our fear is meant to lead us to respond in a way that leads us to safety. However, sometimes our fear becomes irrational and shuts us down. Courage is the virtue *that does not replace fear*, but lives in its midst. Courage allows us to face our fears and to move forward.

Let us take our lead from the Blessed Virgin Mary: when approached suddenly by an angel of God and asked to accept the responsibility of being the Mother of God, she accepts God's call—without knowing the outcome—and finds peace and joy!

The Visitation

The Second Anxious Mystery: Worry about Others

Fear and Apprehension: We can have debilitating anxiety and worry about family, friends and those whom we care about when their lives are upended, they are going through trials, or carrying burdens.

The KEY is not to be paralyzed by fear, but to do acts of charity, love, and devotion towards our loved ones, and to pray for them.

Antidote: We support our family, friends and others that we worry about by offering all of the emotional and temporal assistance that we can give, and by praying for them; then, we leave the rest up to God, entrusting our loved ones to him, that he will see their plight and provide for their needs.

When Mary was told that Elizabeth was pregnant, no doubt she was happy for her. In that time, if a woman was barren, it often was seen as a punishment from God.

Yet, Elizabeth was an elderly woman; her pregnancy was no less than miraculous. One could only imagine what was going through Mary's head when she was told that Elizabeth was already six months pregnant. So, we are told that “*Mary set out proceeding in haste into the hill country.*” (Luke 1:39)

We have to understand that there was some risk in Mary traveling to visit Elizabeth. Mary was now pregnant herself, early in her term, she would now be traveling on a donkey into the hill country. The traveling would be rough on her; further, it was not unusual for bandits along the way to be looking for a vulnerable party in which to rob.

Was Mary filled with anxiety and worry about the state of Elizabeth's health? It would be natural to have serious

concerns about an *elderly* woman being already in her sixth month.

I cannot imagine anything less than joy in Mary's heart as she raced across the hill country to aid her relative and friend. She had already accepted God's will for herself and was now oriented towards caring for her relative in need. When she first arrives, Mary reveals the state of her soul, "*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior.*" (Luke 1:46-47)

In Elizabeth's case, God gave her the gift of life in her once barren womb in calling her to be the mother of St. John the Baptist. When God calls us to something, he gives us the grace and ability to carry out his plan. Elizabeth could have had her own anxieties about herself and her pregnancy, and yet we are told that she was "*filled with the Holy Spirit,*" (Luke 1:41) no doubt presuming great joy within her.

When someone we love, perhaps a spouse, or a child, or a close relative or friend, suffers in some way, e.g., from a debilitating illness, or from misfortune, or goes through a great trial, we can plunge into anxiety and worry about them or the state of their soul. Additionally, many a mother worries about her children who have stopped going to Mass or who have entered into a sinful lifestyle.

How are we to confront such worries and fears? Let us follow Mary's lead and take the actions that are in our control, e.g., providing or arranging care and support for the ones in need, praying for them, and leaving the rest to God. If we are able to accomplish these things—especially the third—we may find ourselves at peace.

The Birth of Jesus

The Third Anxious Mystery: *Doubting God's Care for Me*

Fear and Anxiety: The anxiety and insecurity that we experience when we don't feel safe, or when no one seems to be watching over us or caring for us, can cause great distress. In these situations, the ultimate fear is that God is not concerned about us or won't take care of us.

The KEY is to call upon God and ask for his help and guidance—and even his direct intervention if it is needed.

Antidote: Trust in God's providence brings us peace of mind and heart.

When Mary was pregnant, Caesar Augustus had decreed that the whole world had to be enrolled in a census in their own town. (Luke 2:1) Mary and Joseph went up from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to Bethlehem, the city of David, because Joseph was of the house and family of David. (Luke 2:4-5)

While they were there, Mary's time had come to give birth. It became a harrowing situation because Mary and Joseph could not find an inn which would accept them. (Luke 2:7) Mary was carrying the Son of God in her womb, and was about to give birth, yet there was no door open to them!

The situation is disturbing and it *appears* that Mary and Joseph are left to their own devices. They had to do what they could to find a sheltered place for Mary to give birth. In the end, they find a stable where Mary gives birth to Jesus. There, she lays him in a manger, a feeding trough for animals.

God's providential care was guiding this entire situation. The Father deigned that his Son would be born in poverty, in a stable for barnyard animals! As Mary was called to be the Mother of God, she and Joseph had to trust that God would follow through in caring for them and in ensuring the safe birth of His Son. *Everything* that happened surrounding Jesus' birth, indeed everything that happened from his conception to death on the Cross, was according to God's word.

Have you ever wondered if God cares for you or if he is watching out for you, especially in times of misfortune, distress or hardship?

Jesus reminds us of God's providential care for us, when he says, "*Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.*" (Matthew 10:29-31)

Let us follow Mary's and Joseph's lead when they had to rely upon God in a desperate situation. Like them we need to entrust ourselves to God and request his care in faith, trusting that he will be there for us. In doing so, we, like Mary and Joseph, will find peace and joy.

The Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple

The Fourth Anxious Mystery: *Fear of Suffering*

Fear and Anxiety: There is an innate fear in human beings of suffering, and more specifically, the Cross. Perhaps that is because the greatest fear of human beings is death, and the Cross is intricately linked to it.

The KEY is to be obedient to God and to accept the cross in our daily life because it is there that lies the grace of God and our eventual eternal life.

Antidote: obedience to God is a fundamental aspect of our faith, even if it means suffering. In fact, the line between saints and sinners often has to do with obedience or lack thereof, respectively.

God does not expect more from us that we can give. Mary and Joseph offered two pigeons because they were poor and that's all that they could give, while the wealthy offered up unblemished lambs or goats.

Remember the widow's mite. When Jesus noticed the wealthy putting large sums into the treasury and a poor widow putting in two small coins, he said, "*I tell you truly, this poor widow put in more than all the rest; for those others have all made offerings from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has offered her whole livelihood.*" (Luke 21:3-4)

When Mary and Joseph took Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, they met a man named Simeon, who blessed them and said to Mary, "*Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted, and you yourself a sword will pierce, so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.*" (Luke 2:34-35)

The prophecy of the Cross is first revealed to Mary at Jesus' presentation in the temple. This must have been a stunning thing for Mary to hear; however, she ponders the prophecy of Simeon in her heart, brings it to prayer

and discerns its meaning while staying committed to the tasks at hand of raising Jesus.

Mary and Joseph offer sacrifices to God in the temple fulfilling what is required of them in the Old Covenant. Meanwhile, Simeon gives the prophecy to Mary in regard to the Sacrifice that will be offered to fulfill the New Covenant, a sacrifice she will be requested to enter into fully. Jesus says to his followers, *“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”* (Luke 14:27) Thus, participating in the cross leads to eternal life which brings eternal happiness.

Obedience to God and acceptance of his will for us is essential in our lives, even if it means enduring the cross for without this we would be afflicted in spirit and lose our way to God. The saints have shown us the peace and even joy that comes with uniting ourselves to the Cross. This is what Mary would do at that key moment in salvation history.

So, as we ourselves strive to be obedient to God and to our responsibilities in life, let us follow the example of Mary, who remained obedient to what God asked of her and pondered the meaning of the Cross in her life until the time came for her to embrace it. In the meantime, Mary found peace and joy in her life while fulfilling the tasks of being a wife and mother because she placed her faith and trust in the Lord. If we too want to experience peace and joy—especially in eternal life—let us follow Mary’s lead.

The Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple

The Fifth Anxious Mystery: Fear of Losing God

Fear and Anxiety: There is great fear and anxiety about losing someone close to us, especially when it is a child. However, losing God also brings another form of anxiety that reaches the very depths of the soul.

In our worries about losing our loved ones or finding ourselves separated from God, the KEY is to keep searching for Jesus and to never give up.

Antidote: When you “lose God”, call out to the Good Shepherd, Jesus. He will hear your voice and come to you, and in green pastures he will give you repose; by restful waters he will lead you and refresh your soul. (Psalm 23)

While traveling home from Jerusalem, Mary and Joseph lose track of Jesus, thinking that he is still in their caravan, not realizing that he remained in Jerusalem. A miscommunication between the two of them and Jesus causes them great anxiety.

After three days of searching, Mary and Joseph find Jesus in the temple sitting in the midst of the teachers. When Mary and Joseph see him, they are astonished, and Mary says to him, *“Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.”* (Luke 2:48)

The three days of losing Jesus as a 12 year-old foreshadows the three days when Mary will lose Jesus by his death on the Cross only to be joyfully reunited with him on the third day when he rises from the dead.

From this event we are reminded that even the greatest of saints have at times misunderstood God. Mary and Joseph show us what to do in times of miscommunication,

misunderstanding, or the loss of a loved one—even if the one we think we have lost is God himself! The KEY is to keep searching for Jesus, and to not give up until you have found him. -And, if you don’t know where to begin, start by looking for him in his Father’s House, the Church, with all of her sacraments.

In life, many people allow fear and anxiety to take over and to divert them from what they should be about. Fear and anxiety can even act as a barrier between ourselves and God. Or, some walk away from God when they choose a lifestyle of sin or commit grave sin that cuts them off from him. Still others who become enslaved by addiction, lose their freedom to choose God, and are “carried away” in fetters by their addiction.

In all of these situations, what are we to do? We follow the example of Mary and Joseph, and we call out to God and begin a search for him even though our predicament can be very difficult and seem hopeless.

Does this apply to the powerless addict or the one who sins gravely? Yes, it does! The Lord Jesus will never turn his back on anyone who calls out to him. Heed the words of Our Lord when he says, *“I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”* (Luke 11:9)

Remember the parable of the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine sheep to search for the one sheep who had gone astray? (Matthew 18:12) If you keep searching for the Lord, you will find him.

It is said that sheep know the voice of the shepherd; when he calls, they will recognize his voice and follow him. (John 10:4) However, the Lord also says, *“I know my sheep and mine know me.”* (John 10:14) Thus, the shepherd also knows the voice of his sheep. So, when you have lost Jesus, and are in trouble, call out to him. He will hear your voice and come to you.

Bear in mind that when Mary and Joseph lost Jesus, he had not lost them; he was in his Father’s House. We may lose sight of Jesus, but he will never lose sight of us. When you are lost and overcome by fear and anxiety, call out to Jesus, and the Good Shepherd will hear your voice and come to you.

It is time to abandon the Anxious Mysteries! They are not from God—they are a consequence of the Fall. In living in fear and anxiety, and trying to control our lives and that of others, we betray our faith in God and in his Divine Providence. Follow Mary’s lead, and live and pray the Joyful Mysteries! ■



Thanks to *your* prayers and donations, we are glad to announce the ordination of Fr. Patrick Rooney, OP to the priesthood, and Br. Columban Mary Hall, OP to the transitional diaconate this past May 26th.