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MARY IN POPE FRANCIS' GOSPEL OF MERCY AND JOY

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One of the first few books that came out soon after the election of Pope Francis was a biography authored by Paul Vallely. It bears the curious title *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots*.[1] Upon reading the book's preface, one realizes that the phrase "untying the knots" refers to the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title "Mary, Untier of Knots." One immediately gets a sense that the Blessed Mother plays a significant role in the life and ministry of Pope Francis. Vallely tells of how then Jorge Bergoglio, who stayed in Germany for a few months to work on a doctoral project which he was not able to pursue, returned to Argentina with a postcard bearing the image of Mary, Untier of Knots.[2] Vallely then uses the metaphor of untying knots to illustrate how Bergoglio tried to confront the knots in his life and how

[1]Paul Vallely, *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

[2]For a brief history of the painting of *Mary*, *Untier of Knots*, see Vallely, *Pope Francis*, 58–59. See also https://www.osv.com/OSVNewsweekly/ByIssue/Article/Tabld/735/ ArtMID/13636/ArticleID/6201/Mary-Undoer-of-Knots-Old-devotion-revivedpopularity.aspx#sthash.ChLQCXxw.dpuf (accessed March 5, 2015).

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he embarked on a journey of untying them, a process which brought him to the papal loggia on that night of March 13, 2013.[3]

Pope Francis' devotion to the Blessed Mother was manifested right on Day 1 of his papacy. On that first morning as Pope, he visited the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, one of the oldest basilicas in Rome. He would frequent this basilica dedicated to Our Lady especially on the eve of and upon his return from his overseas trips. Is it simply a matter of following the papal tradition of visiting Santa Maria Maggiore and invoking the intercession and protection of Our Lady that he drops by the basilica? Or does it spring from an intimate relationship with Our Lady and a deep understanding of her role in the life of the Church and in his ministry as bishop of Rome and pastor of the universal Church? Who is Mary for Pope Francis? This is the question which this essay seeks to answer. It springs from the conviction that Pope Francis' acts of reverence towards the Blessed Mother in his many visits to Santa Maria Maggiore and to Marian shrines during his overseas trips are no mere pious shows of devotion. Instead, these are the expressions of a deeply held interior knowledge of the role of Mary in his life as a person, a Jesuit who has had to untie many knots in his life, a bishop-cardinal whose ministry was shaped in the slums of Buenos Aires, and a pastor whose vision of the Church is a poor Church, a missionary Church, a Church of mercy that proclaims the joyful Good News of God's mercy and compassion.

Interpreting Pope Francis' mind on Mary could prove to be a difficult task since he is not a systematic theologian who has written a significant body of literature which one could consult for this purpose. Keith Lemna and David Delaney propose three starting points towards understanding the mind of Pope Francis: the Argentinian liberation theology particularly expressed in the theology of the people (*teologia del pueblo*), the 2007 Aparecida Document which was produced by a committee chaired by him, and the writings of Luigi Giovanni Giussani, the founder of the ecclesial movement *Communion and Liberation*.[4]

[3]Vallely, *Pope Francis*, xi–xii, 58–59.

[4]Keith Lemna & David Delaney, "Three Pathways into the Theological Mind of Pope Francis," *Nova et Vetera* 12:1 (2014): 25–56.

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However, the fact that Pope Francis sees himself primarily as a pastor who seeks to evoke in his flock the zeal and enthusiasm for mission means that he has to communicate in plain and simple language, one that is not given to theological sophistry, but without being in any way simplistic. Hence, in order to understand the Mariology of Pope Francis, one simply has to grasp his view of himself before God, of who Jorge Bergoglio is, and then his understanding of the Church, its nature and mission in today's world, and finally, of popular religiosity, which is the expression of the faith of poor people. These are the necessary backgrounds against which Pope Francis' understanding of Mary should be placed. Otherwise, one could fall precisely into the dangers and errors against which Vatican II warns the faithful: that Marian devotion degenerates into sterile or transitory affection, or to a certain vain credulity. Instead, the Council asserts that true devotion "proceeds from true faith, by which we are led to know the excellence of the Mother of God, and we are moved to a filial love toward our mother and to the imitation of her virtues."[5]

Pope Francis: Who He Is, Who the Church Is

A Sinner Standing Before a Merciful God

"I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner." In August 2013, Pope Francis granted the request for an interview by his fellow Jesuit Antonio Spadaro, who came on behalf of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, *America*, and several other major Jesuit journals around the world. Spadaro was not sure whether he could ask the question. But he did. "Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?" And to this question came the answer: "I am a sinner … I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon." Hence, his episcopal motto: *Miserando atque Eligendo*. Francis went on to explain that this motto came from the homilies of Venerable Bede whose reflection on the Call of Matthew (Mt. 9:9–13) touched him deeply: "Jesus saw a

[5]*Lumen Gentium* 67. See Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-conciliar Documents* Vol. 1 (New York: Costello, 1974), 422.

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publican, and since he looked at him with feelings of love and chose him, he said to him, 'Follow me.'"[6] He then refers to Caravaggio's painting, *The Call of Matthew*, which he visits and contemplates every time he is in Rome because it has made a deep and lasting impression on him and has helped him articulate his self-understanding: "I am a sinner, but I trust in the infinite mercy and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ, and I accept in a spirit of penance."[7]

Pope Francis' self-accusation is not a generalized acceptance of the existential fallibility of the human being. Instead, it is rooted in his concrete experiences of mistakes committed in the course of his life especially in performing the daily tasks of his office. These are, for Paul Vallely, the knots which Francis would have to undo in the years following the completion of his years of service as superior of the Jesuits in Argentina. In the interview with Spadaro, he admits thus:

> In my experience as superior in the Society, to be honest, I have not always behaved in that way—that is, I did not always do the necessary consultation. And this was not a good thing. My style of government as a Jesuit at the beginning had many faults. That was a difficult time for the Society: an entire generation of Jesuits had disappeared. Because of this I found myself Provincial when I was still very young. I was only 36 years old. That was crazy. I had to deal with difficult situations, and I made my decisions abruptly and by myself …. My authoritarian and quick manner of making decisions led me to have serious problems and to be accused of being ultraconservative.[8]

In Pope Francis, this deep and realistic sense of his being a sinner is matched by an even deeper sense of God's mercy and compassion on him as a sinner. This is who God is for him: a God of mercy. In

[6]See https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/library_article/252/Matthew_the_Tax_Collector_Venerable_Bede.html/ (accessed March 5, 2015).

[7]Antonio Spadaro, "A Big Heart Open to God" (interview with Pope Francis), *America* (Sept. 30, 2013): http://www.americamagazine.org/pope-interview (accessed March 3, 2015).

[8]Spadaro, "A Big Heart Open to God." On Bergoglio's years as Provincial during Argentina's tumultuous years, see Vallely, *Pope Francis*, 39–58.

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his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis invites the faithful to approach this God of mercy:

> God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy. Christ, who told us to forgive one another "seventy times seven" (Mt. 18:22) has given us his example: he has forgiven us seventy times seven. Time and time again he bears us on his shoulders. No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by this boundless and unfailing love. With a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew.[9]

Pope Francis insists, however, that God's mercy is not an abstract concept or an otherworldly reality. It is as concrete as to have a face, a body, in Jesus Christ who is God's mercy in person. He reiterates the point made by his predecessor, Benedict XVI, that Jesus Christ is what Christianity is all about. "Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."[10] Pope Francis points to Thomas, Peter, and the two disciples at Emmaus who were privileged to have a singular experience of the mercy of God in Jesus. These disciples, although beset by doubts and despair at the seeming hopelessness of their predicament, were strengthened unto a new certitude and a new hope at the embrace of mercy which the Risen Christ has extended to them. Jesus did not abandon them. Instead, he patiently restored them back to faith and confidence in him. Pope Francis urges Christians to remember that "God always waits for us, even when we have left him behind. He is never far from us, and if we return to him, he is ready to embrace us."[11]

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[9]*Evangelii Gaudium* 3 (http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#_ftn3 [accessed March 3, 2015]).

[10]Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* 1 (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 98 [2006]: 217).

[11]Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*, ed. Giuliano Vigini (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2014), 1–3.

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A Merciful Church on Mission to the Poor

Just as Francis knows a God of mercy, so too does he profess and dream of a Church of mercy. For him, the primary mission of the Church is to show mercy. He believes that the Church as a faith community "has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father's infinite mercy."[12] Mercy is at the center of the Church's nature and mission. When Francis asserts that the Church's missionary mandate impels it to "go forth" constantly, to take the first step always, and to bear fruit and rejoice abundantly, he sees these movements always in relation to mercy. The Church goes forth to the peripheries to show mercy; the Church takes the first step to show mercy especially to sinners; the Church bears fruit and rejoices in every sinner it has welcomed back to the fold. Hence, Francis reminds priests "that the confessional must not be a torture chamber but rather an encounter with the Lord's mercy which spurs us on to do our best."[13] Priests, he says, should remember that "the Good Shepherd enters through the door, and the doors of mercy are the wounds of the Lord: if you do not enter into your ministry through the Lord's wounds, you will not be good shepherds."[14] This conviction regarding the centrality of mercy in the mission of the Church is behind Pope Francis' decision to declare a Jubilee Year of Mercy which begins on December 8, 2015 and culminates on November 20, 2016.

Mission and mercy are inseparable in the mind and ministry of Pope Francis. Lemna and Delaney hold that the Church's missionary mandate is the foremost concern of the Pope.

> Pope Francis is moved in his thinking by the desire to kindle the fire of new evangelization and that all of the pathways into his thought

[12] *Evangelii Gaudium* 24.

[13] *Evangelii Gaudium* 44.

[14] From Pope Francis' Homily at the Presbyteral Ordinations (May 24, 2014), http://w2.vatican.va/content/ francesco/en/homilies/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140511_omelia-ordinazioni-presbiterali.pdf (accessed March 4, 2015).

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> that we will have explored coalesce around his desire for the Church to become more fully missionary, and his recognition that mission should proceed by awakening the religious heart of man with the attraction of the Cross of Christ humbly made present to the world through the personal witness of the Church.[15]

For Pope Francis, the Church's mission of mercy flows from her own experience of the mercy of God who goes out of His way in search of the lost. Jesus Christ hanging on the cross is God's proof of God's merciful love for sinners. As St. Paul tells the Romans, "God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). The Church witnesses to God's merciful love for her by being merciful herself.

In emphasizing the Church's mission of mercy, Pope Francis likens the Church to a "mother with an open heart." In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he repeatedly describes the Church as the Father's house, the doors of which are wide open. This is a clear echo of Aparecida's declaration:

> We are called to be a Church with open arms, who knows how to welcome and value each one of her members. Therefore, we encourage the efforts made in the parishes to become "home and school of communion," animating and forming small communities and basic church communities, as well as in the lay associations, ecclesial movements and new communities.[16]

The Church must be ready to welcome her prodigal sons and daughters who, moved by the Spirit, wish to return to her embrace. As a mother, the Church is not only ready to welcome her children—she is also ever ready to feed them with the sacraments, especially the Eucharist which, for Pope Francis, "is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful

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[15]Lemna & Delaney, "Three Pathways," 28.

[16]*Evangelii Gaudium* 46–47. See "Message of the 5th General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Carribean," *Concluding Document of the General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Carribean* (Aparecida, Brazil: CELAM, 2007), 16 (http://www.aecrc.org/documents/Aparecida-Concluding%20Document.pdf [accessed March 17, 2015], hereafter cited as *Aparecida Document*, the more popular name of the document).

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medicine and nourishment for the weak."[17] As a mother, the Church has special care and concern for the least in society, for the poor who are the privileged recipients of the Gospel.[18] Francis holds that "there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor."[19] Speaking before representatives of popular movements around the world, he reminded them "that love for the poor is at the centre of the Gospel."[20] On his apostolic visit to the Philippines, he underlined this point by saying: "Our treatment of the poor is the criterion on which each of us will be judged" (cf. Mt. 25:40, 45).[21]

A Poor Church is a Church of the Poor

Placing the poor at the center of the Gospel and of the Church's evangelizing mission, Pope Francis expresses his desire to see "a Church which is poor and for the poor."[22] A Church which is poor lives according to the values of the beatitudes, placing its full trust in divine providence as poor people do. Furthermore, it means living as the poor do, in simplicity and poverty. Pope Francis reminded the Filipino priests and religious that "only by becoming poor ourselves, by stripping away our complacency, will we be able to identify with

[17]*Evangelii Gaudium* 47.

[18]Benedict XVI, Address to the Brazilian Bishops in the Cathedral of São Paulo, Brazil (May 11, 2007), 3 (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 99 [2007]: 428).

[19]*Evangelii Gaudium* 48.

[20]Pope Francis' Speech during the World Meeting of Popular Movements (October 28, 2014), http://w2. vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papafrancesco_20141028_incontro-mondiale-movimenti-popolari.html (accessed March 4, 2014).

[21]From Pope Francis' Prepared Speech (but undelivered due to unexpected circumstances) in Tacloban Cathedral, Philippines, http://www.rappler.com/specials/pope-francis-ph/81142-full-text-pope-francis-undelivered-speech-palo-cathedral (accessed March 4, 2015).

[22]*Evangelii Gaudium* 198.

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the least of our brothers and sisters."[23] For him, a materialistic lifestyle hampers the credibility of the evangelizer's witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ who became poor for our sake. Instead, a Church which lives simply is one where the poor will feel at home. It is a Church which recognizes the poor's capacity to be active and effective evangelizers instead of making them passive recipients of the Church's evangelizing mission. For Pope Francis,

> the new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the centre of the Church's pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.[24]

Pope Francis' emphasis on the intrinsic relationship between the poor and the mission of the Church is rooted in the *teologia del pueblo* which shapes the mind of the Pope. Lemna and Delaney note that the Argentinian liberation theology expressed in the *teologia del pueblo* integrates preferential option for the poor with the greater tradition of the Church. "Argentinian liberation theology sees the poor within the heart of the People of God, in the light of an ecclesiology of communion where all have a share in the Church."[25] Situated at the heart of the Church's identity and mission, "the poor question the core of the Church's action, ministry, and attitudes. Everything having to do with Christ has to do with the poor, and everything connected to the poor cries out to Jesus Christ: 'whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me' (Mt. 25:40)."[26]

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[23]From Pope Francis' Homily at Manila Cathedral (January 16, 2015), http://www.rappler.com/specials/pope-francis-ph/81004-full-text-pope-francis-homily-manila-cathedral (accessed March 4, 2015).

[24]*Evangelii Gaudium* 198.

[25]Lemna & Delaney, "Three Pathways," 33.

[26]*Aparecida Document* 393, p. 124.

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The Church's special love for the poor consists not only in responding to their material needs but, more importantly, to their spiritual needs as well. For Pope Francis, "the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care …. Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care."[27] He calls attention to the poor's special openness to the faith and their need for God and for the sacraments in which they experience God's friendship, blessing, and guidance. In the sacraments and other sacramentals, the poor celebrate their faith and draw strength in their pilgrimage of faith. For this reason, Pope Francis recognizes the evangelizing power of popular piety. He echoes Paul VI who recognized in popular piety "a thirst for God which only the poor and simple can know"[28] and the Aparecida Document which looks on popular piety as "a spirituality incarnated in the culture of the lowly."[29] For him, pastors must approach these popular expressions of the faith of the simple people with the heart's gaze of the Good Shepherd which seeks to love rather than to judge. "Only from the affective connaturality born of love can we appreciate the theological life present in the piety of Christian peoples, especially among their poor."[30] Pope Francis' conviction as regards popular piety and the poor is rooted in his pastoral experience among the simple people of Argentina. Francisco de Roux, Colombia's Jesuit provincial, says of him: "He is a man of popular piety. He captures the experience of God in the simplicity of popular practices, processions, shrines, the Christmas novena, the family saying the rosary. To him, the strength of Catholicism is in the way simple people live their faith."[31]

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[27]*Evangelii Gaudium* 200.

[28]*Evangelii Gaudium* 123. Cf. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 48 (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 68 [1976]: 38).

[29]*Evangelii Gaudium* 124. Cf. *Aparecida Document* 263, p. 89.

[30]*Evangelii Gaudium* 125.

[31]Vallely, *Pope Francis*, 35.

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Pope Francis: Who Mary Is

Having discussed succinctly Pope Francis' understanding of himself as a sinner who has been chosen by God out of his great mercy, and his view of the Church as a Church of mercy tasked with a mission of mercy directed especially towards the poor in the peripheries, we are now ready to attempt an answer to the question, "Who is Mary for Pope Francis?" As we have said, God's passionate concern for sinners like Pope Francis and the similar vocation of the Church to care for the poor serve as the framework against which the Pope's view of Mary may be understood. We made specific mention of popular piety as an expression of the poor's faith not only because Pope Francis sees it as a powerful tool for evangelization but because for him, it is a mirror through which one sees into the searching soul of the poor, a door through which they reach out to this God of mercy and compassion. It is also through popular piety that Pope Francis' Mary is best located, known, and understood.

Mary, Mother to Her Sons and Daughters

For Pope Francis, Mary is a mother more than anything else. Mary's words to St. Juan Diego at Tepeyac Hill speak to him powerfully: "Let your heart not be troubled …. Am I not here, who am your Mother?" She is a mother to her children who have recourse to her in all their needs, sufferings, pains, and afflictions. In San José del Talar in Agronomía, a middle class suburb of Argentina where the image of Mary, Untier of Knots, is venerated, hundreds of people come on pilgrimage. Fr. Ricardo Aloe who is in charge of the shrine holds the conviction that Mary listens to the pleas of her children. "They all feel they are listened to and understood by the Virgin. As Mother, she is very attentive to our problems. The knots are metaphors of the difficulties we have. She appeals to God to help us with them."[32]

Just as God is a merciful and compassionate Father, so too is Mary, as the Mother of God, a merciful and compassionate mother.

[32]Vallely, *Pope Francis*, xii.

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She is there, ready to come to the aid of her children. Addressed as "Mother" by her children, she is present with them in their most difficult and painful moments. Pope Francis empathically made this point in Tacloban, Philippines, when he preached to the survivors of super typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan). He spoke thus:

> We are like a little child in the moments when we have so much pain and no longer understand anything. All we can do is grab hold of her hand firmly and say "Mommy"—like a child does when it is afraid. It is perhaps the only words we can say in difficult times—"Mommy" …. Let us look to our Mother and, like a little child, let us hold onto her mantle and with a true heart say—"Mother" …. Know that the tenderness of Mary never lets you down. And holding onto her mantle and with the power that comes from Jesus' love on the cross, let us move forward and walk together as brothers and sisters in the Lord.[33]

For Pope Francis, Mary's motherhood towards her children shines forth from the foot of the Cross. As Vatican II says, Mary "persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross, where she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, enduring with her only begotten Son the intensity of his suffering, (and) associated herself with his sacrifice in her mother's heart."[34] Just as Jesus is the brother to all who are suffering and in pain, so is Mary the mother to all of them.

> She is the woman whose heart was pierced by a sword and who understands all our pain. As mother of all, she is a sign of hope for peoples suffering the birth pangs of justice …. As a true mother, she walks at our side, she shares our struggles and she constantly surrounds us with God's love.[35]

As a mother who extends a helping hand and a loving embrace to her suffering children, Mary also gathers them together. Like any other mother, it is her special joy to see her children gathered and

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[33]From Pope Francis' Homily at the Mass in Tacloban (January 17, 2015), http://www.rappler.com/specials/pope-francis-ph/81106-full-text-pope-francis-homily-tacloban (accessed March 5, 2015).

[34]*Lumen Gentium* 58.

[35]*Evangelii Gaudium* 286.

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united around her. For Pope Francis, this is the meaning and function of the Marian shrines. Her many titles, oftentimes related to specific shrines, are expressions of how she "shares the history of each people which has received the Gospel and she becomes a part of their historic identity."[36] Examples of these are the titles/shrines of Aparecida and Guadalupe in Latin America, Lourdes and Knock in Europe, EDSA and Madhu in Asia, and Ngomé and Kibeho in Africa. In these and other shrines all over the world, "Mary brings together her children who with great effort come as pilgrims to see her and to be seen by her. Here they find strength from God to bear the weariness and the suffering in their lives."[37] In Guadalupe, for example, the image of Mary became a point of unity which attracts people especially the poor to her. In Guadalupe, Mary took upon herself the cultural and religious symbolism of the indigenous peoples. In her message, she proclaimed her Son and she gave him to all these new peoples who were wounded by their mixed origin.[38]

Mary and the Church's Mission of Mercy

For Pope Francis, Mary is Jesus' gift to the Church, a gift given to the Church by Christ as he was about to die on the Cross. Mary is the expression of Christ's love for His Church whom he did not want to journey without a mother, hence the final word of Christ to his mother, "Woman, behold your Son" (Jn. 19:26–27). Pope Francis points out that this handing over of the gift of Mary happened at the moment "when Jesus endured in his own flesh the dramatic encounter of the sin of the world and God's mercy."[39] Hence, mercy is at the beginning

[36]*Evangelii Gaudium* 286.

[37]*Evangelii Gaudium* 286.

[38]From the Address of Pope Francis during the Meeting with the Bishops of Brazil (July 28, 2013), http://w2. vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130727_gmg-episcopato-brasile.html (accessed March 5, 2015).

[39]*Evangelii Gaudium* 285.

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of the relationship between Mary and the Church. In the middle of this relationship stands Jesus himself, the face of the merciful and compassionate God. Pope Francis affirms the Church's understanding of the relationship between Christ, Mary, the Church, and the faithful: that each in his or her own way brings forth Christ.

> What is said in a universal sense of the virgin mother, the Church, is understood in an individual sense of the Virgin Mary …. In a way, every Christian is also believed to be a bride of God's word, a mother of Christ, his daughter and sister, at once virginal and fruitful …. Christ dwelt for nine months in the tabernacle of Mary's womb. He dwells until the end of the ages in the tabernacle of the Church's faith. He will dwell forever in the knowledge and love of each faithful soul.[40]

Christ's presence in every person which is no less real than his presence in Mary's womb and in the sacred species reserved in the tabernacles is the basis for the Church's ministry of mercy especially to the poor and the outcast, the sinner and the spurned. It is this profound awareness of Christ's presence in them that calls for the Marian "style" in the Church's work of evangelization which is founded on the firm belief "in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness." Pope Francis holds that in Mary,

> we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong who need not treat others poorly in order to feel important themselves. Contemplating Mary, we realize that she who praised God for "bringing down the mighty from their thrones" and "sending the rich away empty" (Lk. 1:52–53) is also the one who brings a homely warmth to our pursuit of justice.[41]

For him, when the Church is able to bring together harmoniously justice and tenderness, and contemplation and concern for others, then will the Church be a home for, and a mother to, multitudes of

[40] *Evangelii Gaudium* 285. Cf. Isaac of Stella, *Sermo* 51: PL 194, 1863, 1865.

[41] *Evangelii Gaudium* 288. The *Aparecida Document* affirms thus: "As in the human family, the Church-family is generated around a Mother, who confers 'soul' and tenderness on shared family life. Mary, Mother of the Church, and model and paradigm of humanity, is shaper of communion" (no. 268).

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peoples. Hence, Mary models for the Church the quality of fruitful motherhood which the latter should aspire for.

Reflecting on the meaning of the circumstances surrounding the finding of the image of the Virgin of Aparecida, Pope Francis reminds the bishops of Brazil that "God's message was one of restoring what was broken, reuniting what had been divided. Walls, chasms, differences which still exist today are destined to disappear. The Church cannot neglect this lesson: she is called to be a means of reconciliation."[42] Here the Pope was referring to how the body of the statue appeared first, then the head. The head was then joined to the body in order to form the image. For him, the union of the head and the body signifies the restoration or the reunification of what was formerly broken. For example, Brazil had been divided by the shameful wall of slavery during the time of colonization. Our Lady of Aparecida, who appears with a black face, was first separated, and then united in the hands of the fishermen, symbolizes the unity of the one country.[43] The Church, then, like the Virgin Mary, must be a symbol of unity for divided, dispersed, and disoriented peoples.

In emphasizing the need for contemplation to balance the mission of extending mercy, Pope Francis points to the source of the vibrancy and zeal of the Church's mission: the divine allure born of the encounter with the Mystery. Again he draws some lessons from the fishermen of Aparecida who welcomed the image of the Virgin Mary. For him, their contemplative stance by which they made room for God's Mystery is the ideal missionary disposition because God's way is through beauty, through attraction. "He awakens in us a desire to keep him and his life in our homes, in our hearts. He reawakens in us a desire to call our neighbours in order to make known his beauty. Mission is born precisely from this divine allure, by this amazement born of encounter."[44] This encounter with the Mystery, in turn,

[42]Address of Pope Francis during the Meeting with the Bishops of Brazil.

[43]Address of Pope Francis during the Meeting with the Bishops of Brazil.

[44]Address of Pope Francis during the Meeting with the Bishops of Brazil.

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convinces the missionary that mission must be done in utter simplicity. Here Pope Francis refers to the language used in the proclamation of the Good News, in relaying the message of the Mystery to others. He is of the opinion that for many times we could not draw people to God because they could not understand what we were saying to them. This happens, Pope Francis says, because we have forgotten the language of simplicity. We have imported an intellectualism alien to people we are trying to communicate with. "Without the grammar of simplicity, the Church loses the very conditions which make it possible 'to fish' for God in the deep waters of his Mystery."[45]

Mary, Model Disciple and Missionary

Mary is proclaimed "blessed" in the Scriptures, particularly in Luke's Gospel. Her cousin Elizabeth, upon seeing her, exclaims: "Blessed are you among women!" (Lk. 1:42); "Blessed is she who believed" (Lk. 1:45). Mary herself proclaims: "All generations will call me blessed!" (Lk. 1:48). In all these texts, Mary's blessedness is linked to her faith. "She is the perfect icon of faith," Pope Francis says.[46] That Mary is the perfect disciple or the perfect model of discipleship is not a new insight or teaching. The Scriptures have established this point quite clearly. As the Daughter of Zion, Mary symbolized the fulfillment of Israel's long history of faith which includes the many faithful women of the Old Testament. "In the fullness of time, God's word was spoken to Mary and she received that word into her heart, her entire being, so that in her womb it could take flesh and be born as light for humanity."[47] The early theologians of the Church have also affirmed Mary's faith. For instance, her title as Mary, Untier of Knots, is based on the insight of St. Ireneaus of Lyon (2nd century AD) on the

[45]Address of Pope Francis during the Meeting with the Bishops of Brazil.

[46]Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei* no. 58 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), 89. Cf. *Aparecida Document* 266, p. 90.

[47]*Lumen Fidei* 58. Cf. John Paul II, who expounds on the Scripture texts which show Mary's faith in his encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater* 19–21 (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 79 [1987]: 383–389).

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contrast between Eve and Mary. "And thus also it was that the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve has bound fast through unbelief, this did the Virgin Mary set free through faith."[48] In *Lumen Gentium,* Vatican II highlights Mary's free and active cooperation in the work of salvation through faith and obedience. She is in no way a passive recipient or instrument in God's salvific plan.[49]

What does Pope Francis add to the Church's reflection on Mary's faith? Or perhaps, what aspect of her faith does he wish to emphasize? Reading *Lumen Fidei* and *Evangelii Gaudium* together, it would seem that the intimate link between faith and joy is what Pope Francis wants to underline. He cites St. Justin Martyr who says that Mary, upon receiving the angel's message, conceived "faith and joy." Pope Francis points out that the experience of Mary's faith bearing fruit in Jesus shows that "when our own spiritual lives bear fruit, we become filled with joy, which is the clearest sign of faith's grandeur."[50] Hence, his prayer to Mary includes the petition, "Sow in our faith the joy of the Risen One."[51] Pope Francis sees Mary letting herself be guided by the Holy Spirit in her journey of faith towards service and fruitfulness. Mary's journey of faith begins with the joy of receiving the Good News from the angel, continues to the sharing of that joy with her cousin Elizabeth, then to the birth of Jesus and his childhood in Nazareth. However, interspersed with that joy is the prophecy of Simeon which Pope Francis likens to the "veil" which hides the Mystery of the Divine in Jesus, the mystery with which Mary would live intimately.[52] It is the

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[48]Ireneaus of Lyon, *Against Heresies*, III, 22, 4, in Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 1: The Apostolic Fathers—Justin Martyr—Irenaeus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdman, 1969), 455.

[49]*Lumen Gentium* 56.

[50]*Lumen Fidei* 58. Cf. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Chapter 100, in Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 1: The Apostolic Fathers—Justin Martyr—Irenaeus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdman, 1969), 249.

[51]*Lumen Fidei* 60.

[52]*Evangelii Gaudium* 287.

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mystery which will be fully manifested in the Resurrection, the final meeting point of Mary's faith and joy.

For this reason, Mary is the Star of Evangelization—in Mary, the Church sees the perfect combination of faith and joy: the fruitfulness of faith leads to joy; the joy of faith leads to even more fruitfulness. Pope Francis wishes the Church to recover and deepen her enthusiasm in announcing the joy of the Gospel. He echoes Paul VI's challenge to the Church to get hold of that "delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow." He wants the Gospel to be preached to people and be received by them "not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ."[53] To whom else should the Church turn if not to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who first received the joy of the Good News of the incarnation of the Son of God? From whom else should the Church learn how to become joyful evangelizers if not from Mary who was also the first to share the joy of the Good News when she ran in haste to her cousin Elizabeth? From whom else should the Church draw inspiration and courage if not from Mary who, because of her persevering faith, became the first to enjoy fully the fruits of the Good News in her being taken up to heaven body and soul?

Hence, Pope Francis points to Mary, "the woman of faith, who lives and advances in faith," and whose "exceptional pilgrimage of faith represents a constant point of reference for the Church."[54] With the Holy Spirit, she is always present in the midst of the Church just as she was with the disciples in the Upper Room as they prayed and waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14). Thus, "she is the Mother of the Church which evangelizes, and without her we could never truly understand the spirit of the new evangelization."[55] She, the perfect disciple, is also the great missionary who continues the

[53]*Evangelii Gaudium* 10. Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 80.

[54]*Evangelii Gaudium* 287. Cf. *Lumen Gentium* 58, *Redemptoris Mater* 6.

[55]*Evangelii Gaudium* 284.

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work of her Son and who forms missionaries like herself. For Pope Francis, the shrines of Mary scattered throughout the world are not only venues where Mary shows herself as a woman of communion, a mother who gathers her children. These are also testaments to her continuing journey with God's missionary people. The Guadalupe event, for example, is a Pentecost event which opened for the American people the gifts of the Spirit. It was there that Mary brought forth the Gospel for the Americas just as she bore the Savior for the world. Since then, she has become one with the people. "We joyfully note that she has become part of the journey of each of our peoples, deeply entering into the fabric of their history and taking on the noblest and most significant features of the people in them …. She belongs to them and they experience her as mother and sister."[56]

For Pope Francis, then, Mary sums up in herself what the Church is called to be as a missionary of the Church , a Church of mercy and joy, a Church whose arms are open to, and whose heart beats for love of, the poor. To her, Pope Francis leads the Church in prayer:

> Star of the new evangelization,
> help us to bear radiant witness to communion,
> service, ardent and generous faith,
> justice and love of the poor,
> that the joy of the Gospel
> may reach to the ends of the earth,
> illuminating even the fringes of our world.
> Mother of the living Gospel,
> wellspring of happiness for God's little ones,
> pray for us. Amen. Alleluia![57]

[56] *Aparecida Document* 269, p. 91.

[57] *Evangelii Gaudium* 288.

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