

## Lesson 2

### Benedictine Centre: Initiation into Spiritual Life Lesson 2: “Our Lady in Spiritual Life”

**1- Introduction:** The Goal of this lesson is to introduce the student into the place and role of Our Lady in his spiritual life.

In order to do so, a sharp question is addressed right from the beginning, to help him/her start to think in a different way: “is Mary devotional, or structural (i.e. vital)?” In fact, for us Catholics - without going into the realm of non-Catholics – we don’t have a clear vision of the Place of Mary in our daily spiritual life. She is sort of left to the *devotional area*, which means to free choice and taste of the faithful. Almost like the choice of a Saint that one would like more than others. To a great extent, for many Catholics, Mary remains an optional choice.

Without taking out anything from Jesus, because He is the Centre of our Worship and of our life, because **HE** alone is at the same time True and fully God and true and fully human, but we need to better understand the Place of Mary in our Life.

**2-** In order to deepen our understanding of Mary, and sharpen our discernment, we will be following essentially the Gospel. We will discover how she is presented in it. Different exegetical techniques will be used.

We start by following **St Luke’s Gospel’s** structure and **golden thread**. S Luke’s thread is in fact the **“capacity to believe”**. He addresses that issue from the beginning of his Gospel and he develops it throughout the Gospel, till its end. We will study the beginning of his Gospel, the double Annunciation, then we will study the Parable of the Sower, which we find in the Synoptics, and we will finish with Mary’s role during the Great Saturday (Holy Saturday) and afterward.

**3- The two Annunciations.** Zechariah’s one and Mary’s. Zechariah’s annunciation “doesn’t work”, he couldn’t believe. Mary’s annunciation “works”. Her Annunciation is composed of two parts: one is strictly hers, and the second is about her Cousin. “Behold your cousin is pregnant” is another challenge for Mary, an invitation to believe as well as for Zechariah and Elisabeth and all of us. Mary will believe both messages given by God to her through the Angel. So, her “yes”, has two components: hers (strictly) and ours (for us). “She uttered her yes ‘in the name of all human nature’ (St. Thomas Aquinas, STh III, 30, 1). By her obedience she became the new Eve, mother of the living.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 511)

**Note:** the original text says: “no Word (*said by God*) is impossible (to be realised by Him in us and through us) to God, and not: “nothing is impossible to God”. This sheds one more light on what is “to be believed”.

The student is invited here to see, contemplate, that his/her ‘yes’ to God is stored for him/her “in Mary”, ready to be used by him. We discover that each one of us, through baptism has a lot of “talents” in Mary’s “bank”. We need to use them, invest in them. Nobody has the “capacity to believe” in the Word of God. Only Mary has it.

We then study the Visitation where Mary is called “blessed” by Elisabeth for this specific reason: “capacity to believe in the Word of God”. “All generations will call me ‘blessed’” says Mary truthfully, because she is the only one who believes, and she is the mother of the believers: in the sense that she communicates to us her “capacity to believe” in the word of God.

**4-** We then move on to the **Parable of the Sower**. This Parable is the Key parable (Mark 4:13) that opens all the others. It introduces us to the bipolarity (two poles) of our Faith: Subject (who believes) and Object (in whom we believe). This Parable is focused on the subject (the soil, capacity to believe) and not on the object (Seed, Jesus).

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It is important to attract the attention of the Student here to this bipolarity of our Faith. Christian life is about having a Goal (i.e. Jesus/God) and means (the way to follow Jesus) to reach that Goal. We have three ways of living that combine a goal and a means:

- 1- Our **Goal** is an *earthly* Goal (not necessarily bad), the **means** are *human*.
- 2- Our **Goal** becomes *Jesus*' (second conversion), the **means** remain *human* (our means).
- 3- Our **Goal** is *Jesus*, the **means** become *divine* (Mary's means).

It is important to attract the student's attention by asking: what differentiates the first three soils and the fourth? This difference is fundamental: becoming capable of "bearing fruits". "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last" (John 15:16) "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit" (John 15:6). "The Good Soil" (a name and not an adjective) is the only Soil that bears fruit. In the oriental liturgical tradition (Byzantine and Maronite) Mary is called "The Good Soil". In fact, only Mary bears fruit: Jesus. ("the fruit of your womb Jesus"). Her fruit is Jesus, and He is her only Fruit. Mary's capacity is given to us.

**5- Explanation of the "Hail Mary"**. The diagram of the Sun and the Moon (Soil 4, the Good Soil). We are the soils 1, 2, 3, small imperfect soils, incapable of believing.

**"Hail Mary, Full of Grace"**: the Holy Spirit is filling her completely, there is no "space" in her that is not filled with the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit acts in her with no obstacles (her purity).

**"The Lord (God) is with you"**: the description of the tight and complete relationship between Mary (the moon) and Jesus (the Sun). No more perfect and complete relationship with Jesus, no higher way to contemplate Him (Faith, her eyes) and to Love Him (her heart).

**"Blessed are thou amongst women"**: blessed because you are the only one who believed. "amongst women" means: "amongst all other soils", the subject, the feminine pole of our faith.

**"Blessed is the Fruit of your Womb Jesus"**: the only fruit that Mary produces is Jesus, in Her and Jesus in us. This is why we pray to her: to have Jesus in us grow. Like for Nicodemus (John 3): as adults, we are invited to enter in our "Mother" Mary, in order to let Jesus grow in us, formed by Mary.

**"Holy Mary"**: she is so united with Jesus, that her Holiness is Jesus' Holiness. Nothing less than that.

**"Mother of God"**: "God" here is Jesus. What a mystery: Mary can generate a God!!!

**"Pray for us sinners"**: this is the key passage: "sinners" means that we are one of the three soils that can't bear fruits. Not sinning, is being capable of receiving the Word of God and letting it Incarnate in us, grow in us and reach completion. (as S Paul says: to reach the fullness of Jesus' height).

"Pray for us": means: lift us, from our low and human capacity (the means to follow Jesus), to your divine capacity, give us your Eyes, and your Heart, so we can Contemplate Jesus and love him with your Eyes and your Heart.

**"Now and at the hour of our of death"**: the recourse to Mary is not at a certain point in our day, or week, it is all the time. We need to have our "way of going to Jesus" changed, transformed, moulded, in Mary's way. We need to become "liquid" in Mary's hands, so we can become like her, an extension of her. So then Jesus can be really glorified, with the Father and the Holy Spirit. **"Amen."**

**6-** We move on to continue S Luke's thread: we need to see the vital role Mary will play during that time **between 3pm on Good Friday**, when Jesus dies **and the dawn of Sunday**, when Jesus rises. We invite the students to become aware of the fact that nobody really believed in the Resurrection. We show the Parallel between the 3 announcements of the His death and Resurrections, and the three apparitions in Luke 24. The key is Mary's heart, the only heart/soul that will be able to carry Jesus' words ('I will suffer, die and rise') through that abyss (from 3pm to Sunday's dawn). The Apostles will be scattered and then

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afterwards, will come back to the *New Eve* who remained faithful, believing in the Resurrection, as the only 'wise Virgin', waiting for the Groom to rise, carrying everybody in her heart (she is the Mother, with an immense Love for us). We draw from her the capacity to believe and cross the abyss that separates our death (incapacity to believe) from His Risen Life (the capacity to believe in Him Risen, meeting him).

The study, in negative (like a developed photography film) of the three post-Resurrection apparitions of Luke 24, will reveal Mary's heart and will help us understand what happened within her during these terrible hours (3pm to Sunday's dawn): "a sword will pierce through your own soul also, **so** that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:35). The work of our purification, new creation, is happening in Mary the New Eve: our thoughts of disbelief are like a sword that pains Mary's soul (this is the root of the transformation of our heart, from heart of stone, to a heart of flesh). In her we are hidden and prepared, renewed. She really carried us in her, crossing the abyss. She is really the mother of our faith.

**7- Conclusion:** These above mentioned dips into S Luke's Gospel help us see better the thread he is following, the lesson he is teaching us. The double portico entrance to his Gospel: the Faith of Mary, is being given to us and our bad soil becomes "good" soil. The bi-polar characteristic of our Faith: the Good Soil. The death and resurrection of Jesus, Mary waiting for him, having all of us in her womb. Thus we are being renewed in her soul. This creates the necessity to go to her and draw from her our capacity to believe. (This is why the Apostles, after having been scattered and shattered during Jesus' Passion, gather around Mary as we see at Pentecost.)

Other texts could be studied as well: Cana of Galilee (John 2), Mary at the Cross (John 19:25-26)

From this new perception of who Mary is, as she is presented in the Gospel, we are invited to draw the conclusion and the practical consequences. The Conclusion is: Mary is not optional, she is not to be left to devotion, she is much more, infinitely much more: she makes us cross the abyss from not being able to bear fruit - to being able to bear fruit in her. She is vital, structural to our faith.

One last physical example to show the student how Mary is much more than a 'mediator' between us and Jesus: she is 'structural'. We put a person on a chair (chair+person=Jesus) and an empty chair in front of this person (chair only=Mary). The height and quality of the relationship between Mary and Jesus are incomparable, but seem unreachable for us. If Mary is only a 'Mediator', this means that we remain far from her (as mediator she is a third party) asking her to intercede for us to Jesus, while remaining far from Jesus without a direct/full contact with Him. But, in fact, Mary is much more than an 'Mediator', she is 'structural', i.e. we are invited to be introduced **in** her being/womb (=we are placed on the empty chair (in Mary)): so 'in her' and 'with her' we become capable of Seeing directly Jesus with her capacity (her eyes) and loving directly Jesus with her capacity (her Heart). The difference between a poor understanding of "mediator" and the clear understanding of "structural" is huge. Of course, the journey of being transformed in Mary takes time. But it **she is given to us** right from our first attempt. The height and quality of the relationship between Mary and Jesus as is, is given to us.

**Going directly to Jesus:** some people say that they prefer to go **directly** to Jesus, in fact they go to Him using their own weak means (the three soils, that don't bear fruit). We need to use the fastest, easiest, most secure, complete, perfect and unique means to reach Jesus - Mary's means. She bears fruit. She draws us to Jesus immediately.

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### In order to have a personal relationship with Mary we need to:

- 1- Pray:** in order to receive the grace of seeing Jesus' extended hand, offering us the Gift of his Mother.
  
- 2- Therefore:** Take her into our own (household) (John 19:27). "Enter in her, again" (see John 3:4). She is our Mould.  
She gives us a new heart, of flesh ("flesh of her flesh" Genesis 2)) (Ez 36:26)  
To choose her: as suggested by Saint John, at the foot of the Cross ("behold this is your Mother" (John 19:26). Entrust ourselves totally to her (consecration, receiving the Scapular). To give myself to her, becoming "liquid" for the mould.
  
- 3- Have recourse to Mary:** to go to her often, to put everything in Her Hands, through a Hail Mary.
  - a- Entrust everything to her. Entrust ourselves to her. Entrust our brothers and sisters to her.
  - b- Let Her guide us: let her pass in front of us.
  
- 4- Make the effort of knowing her more:**
  - a- Read the Bible (Luke, John, Parables, Book of Wisdom,..) (methods: implicit, Her envelopment,..).
  - b- With the Saints: Grignon de Montfort: "The Secret of Mary", "True Devotion to Mary", St Bernard, "The interior life of Mary" J.-J. Olier
  - c- Magisterium: Vatican II document: *Lumen Gentium*, Ch. 8.  
John Paul II Redemptoris Mater, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*.  
Catechism of the Catholic Church: 148-149, 165, 273, 411, 466-469, 484-506-511, 529, 721-726, 773, 829, 963-967-975, 1014, 1172, 2617-2619, 2673-2676, 2679, 2682.
  - d- "The Virgin Mary in the writings of Maria Valtorata", Gabriele M. Roschini.
  - e- Please read the various texts I wrote on her. Some can be found on the Blog: <http://amorvincit.blogspot.com>  
While reading, work on deepening the relationship between Jesus and Mary, and between Mary and you, and between Jesus and you (in Mary and with Her).
  
- 5- Spend time daily with her:** Rosary, others...
  
- 6- Activate the Gift:** by saying the Hail Mary, asking for her intervention. See explanation of the Hail Mary: "Full of Grace", "Mother of God", "amongst women", "Pray for us sinners".
  
- 7- Receiving Communion through her :** example of St Therese.
  
- 8- Never to go to pray without Her.**

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