

Family Marian Celebration
Sunday, October 16, 2011 – St. Benedict Church, Johnstown
Homily

I am very pleased to see the young people who led us in reciting the Hail Mary during each decade of the Rosary this afternoon.

What school do you students attend? Do you know that at this moment everyone of us here attends the school of Mary? I will explain what that means in moment. But don't worry; it's not the kind of school where there is a lot to study, homework, or tests to take.

Blessed John Paul II said in his Apostolic Letter on the Most Holy Rosary in 2002

- “through the Rosary, the Christian people sit at the school of Mary and are led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love.”
- “through the Rosary, the faithful receive abundant grace”

What does it mean to sit at the school of Mary?

Let me begin to explain with a story.

I remember some years ago reading a story about a young adult who had been raised in a family which only attended a church occasionally. When they did, it was a non-denominational Christian church which followed a very literal interpretation of Sacred Scripture.

The only sacrament observed by that church was baptism. No one was baptized until they were at least in their teenage years, because each person had to make a personal decision to accept Jesus as his or her Savior.

While attending college, this young man became friends with some Catholic students who regularly attended Mass and received the sacraments, including the sacrament of Penance.

They also regularly participated in activities sponsored by the Catholic campus ministry, including retreats, bible studies, service projects for the poor, etc.

Eventually, one member of the group invited this young man to become Catholic. He went through the RCIA formation program there at college and received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and First Holy Communion at the Easter vigil during his sophomore year.

When he returned to college for his junior year, one of his friends asked him about his summer. One experience he shared with him was that he went to a bible study for young adults at the non-denominational church that he sometimes attended while growing up.

During the bible study they reflected on the story of Jesus, Mary and Joseph going to the Temple and then Jesus remained behind when the group started for home.

This new young Catholic made a comment during the bible study that this is one of the mysteries of the rosary. He was quickly challenged by some of the other participants in that bible study group as to whether or not he was involved in worshiping Mary. They proceeded to tell him that worshiping Mary is wrong because she is not God.

The young man was patient and then proceeded to tell them that it is a sad misunderstanding that some people have about what the Catholic Church teaches about the role of Mary in salvation history and the devotion that Catholics have toward Mary, who indeed is not God, but is truly the Mother of God.

This college student then went on to explain to the others how he had come to appreciate Mary as a model and a guide for living a Christian life.

The story I read about this college student does not explain whether any of the young people at that bible study were ready to accept his Catholic understanding and devotion toward Mary.

However, that story impressed me for a couple of reasons:

- It is certainly impressive to hear about a young person giving witness to his or her Catholic faith
- It is impressive to hear how this young man was able to discern and deal with challenging questions, much the same way as Jesus had to deal with the trick questions of the Pharisees in the Gospel reading today

- Is it OK to pay the census tax?
- If you pay the temple tax are you putting the emperor Caesar on the same level as God?
- It is a story which draws our attention to one of the roles of Mary that I am convinced has a special meaning especially for young people:
 - The role of Mary as witness and guide
 - For us, Mary is a role model and teacher

As Blessed John Paul II said

- “through the Rosary, the Christian people sit at the school of Mary and are led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love.”

All of us are familiar with the expression, “actions speak louder than words.”

That applies in our learning about the Catholic faith. For example

- when I was a child, my grandmother taught me to say some prayers in the Polish language
 - in doing that teaching, a lot of words were exchanged and they had to be repeated over and over, with a great deal of patience on her part
- more important, when I was a child, my grandmother taught me how necessary it is to pray, everyday
 - my grandmother never said a word to me about how important it is to pray
 - my grandmother simply did it; she could sit in her favorite chair by the window while we were playing on the living room floor
 - I had to keep at least one eye on my brothers and sisters while our activity was going on (a puzzle or a game); but I could not help but notice my grandmother totally absorbed in praying her rosary; not distracted by our laughter or conversation

Pope Benedict XVI, in a Message during Lent in 2007, describes the Blessed Virgin Mary’s school of prayer:

- “Mary shows us the way”

- Mary was a person who was always in conversation with the Word of God (as in pondering in her heart the message of the angel at the annunciation)
- Mary was always in conversation with Christ her son; and the Gospels tell us that she spent more time listening than talking to Him, (Christ already knows our needs, but we often don't pay attention to what He is trying to tell us)
- Mary guides us to follow her example, as in the wedding at Cana in the following two ways
 - Mary speaks to her Son
 - Mary tells the servants (and she tells us) "Do whatever my Son tells you"
- Mary shows us the way also by guiding us in what to say to God in prayer
 - Both Blessed John Paul II and Pope Benedict remind us that it is important for us to speak to God about our inmost thoughts, desires, difficulties
 - Blessed John Paul II says that to pray the Rosary is to hand over our burdens to the merciful hearts of Christ and his Mother
 - Pope Benedict reminds us that in praying the Rosary, the content of what we have to say to God in prayer is transformed by the content of the mysteries that we meditate on during the Rosary

In other words, Mary teaches and guides us by word and example

- to be people of prayer
- to pray always
- to not be afraid to ask for her help in our prayer
- to find in the mysteries of the Rosary, the very mysteries that Mary pondered in her heart, the message that we need to understand the words of our prayers

As I mentioned at the beginning, Blessed John Paul II states that to pray the Rosary is to contemplate the face of Christ. A most awesome opportunity for us to contemplate the face of Christ is in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, both at Mass and in Eucharistic adoration.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Blessed John Paul II reminds us that the Church sees in Mary a “Woman of the Eucharist.”

- Blessed John Paul II reminds us that when Mary received and conceived the Son of God through the power of the Holy Spirit, she anticipated the mystery we experience sacramentally when we receive the body and blood of Christ under the signs of bread and wine

In an Angelus message a few years ago, Pope Benedict adds that Mary introduces us into the secret of true Eucharistic adoration. The Holy Father suggests that we need only to reflect on the various mysteries of the Rosary in which Mary is involved in adoration; for example:

- Annunciation – Mary was full of wonder at the angel’s greeting
- Birth of Christ – Mary held the Son of God born in such a humble setting and witnessed the shepherds who came to adore him
- Wedding at Cana – Mary was an eyewitness to the light of the Kingdom manifested in Jesus’ first public miracle
- Crucifixion – Mary gazed upon her Son during his passion and death

So here we are at this celebration of the Holy Eucharist during this month of October which is especially a time for us as Catholic Christians to focus on the Holy Rosary and what it means as a treasure of our Catholic faith.

I recently spoke with a young adult about how important the Rosary is in his life. He told me something that is both remarkable and simple. He said, the best thing about the Rosary is that

- whenever you are alone and you don’t want to pray alone, you can pray the Rosary which means praying to God with and through Mary who is given to us by Christ as our Mother, as Mother of the Church
- whenever you are going through a tough time and cannot find words to express what is going on inside your mind, your heart, your soul, you can pray the Rosary which pretty much covers the worst difficulties and the best experiences that anyone could imagine, and in either situation, you know that God is there.

In our celebration today, we are reminded that through the Rosary we have the opportunity to sit at the school of Mary that leads us to contemplate the beauty of the face of Christ.

I am encouraged by that teaching of Blessed John Paul II, and I am especially encouraged that some of the ideas for this homily came from young people who continue to discover the person of Christ through that teaching about Mary and the Rosary

I am encouraged by and grateful for the presence of all who have come for this Family Marian Celebration.

Mary, Mother of God, pray for us.

Mary, Mother of hope, pray for us.

Mary, Mother of God, pray for us.