

5th Sunday Easter Year "A"
May 9-10, 2020

Mary, Our Protectress...Star of the Sea

Readings: Acts 6: 1-7; 1 Peter 2:4-9; John 14: 1-12

Most everyone has a favorite saint or saints. I certainly am like you in this regard. One of my favorite saints is St. Thomas the Apostle. It is a strong name for a strong saint, an ancient name. The saint whom we most associate with that name was one of the Twelve.

"Master, we do not know where you are going." With these honest words, Saint Thomas perhaps named the proverbial white elephant in the room, namely the lack of understanding of the followers of Jesus. He asked the tough question. Do you think the blueprint was clear at the time of Jesus? Were the apostles dense? If someone says, "where I am you also may be," my initial reaction might well be to ask where he is, and where he is going.

There is little more frustrating for people in life than feeling directionless. Whether in not knowing one's vocation, difficulty in finding a suitable career, not being sure if you have found right one future spouse, and the list goes on. Much of our world is directionless, and we are left to put our finger in the wind to see where everyone else is going. And living here on Cathedral hill, many times it is extremely windy, almost overpowering.

In the midst of this Jesus tells us that **he** is the way, the truth and the life. To be on the way means to be seeking Jesus. We are longing to follow his will for peace, forgiveness and compassion ever more totally in our daily lives. So, what do we do if we feel directionless? For starters, we could realize that the Blessed Mother longs to show us the way. Help is right there. Have you turned to Mary for her intercession?

St. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote beautiful homilies about the Blessed Mother. I'd like to share part of one sermon on the title of Mary, Star of the Sea. A few fishermen will be out on the water this weekend, but for the apostles who were fishermen and others, the sea was their lifeblood.

While the title's origin is ancient¹ and is not without linguistic difficulties, it is a worthy title denoting her protective care as she guides us to safe waters. Without question, people are asking many questions about what lessons we should be gleaning from this pandemic.

But we should agree that there is much mysterious and unknown that remains. We come face to face with weakness and uncertainty. We appreciate the gift of family; we appreciate the wisdom of the elderly and long to spend time with them.

St. Bernard prayed to Mary: "O you, whoever you are, who feel that in the tidal wave of this world you are nearer to being tossed about among the squalls and gales than treading on dry land: if you do not want to founder in the tempest, do not avert your eyes from the brightness of this star.

When the wind of temptation blows up within you, when you strike upon the rock of tribulation, gaze up at this star, call out to Mary. Asking her help, you will never despair. Keeping her in your thoughts, you will never wander away. With your hand in hers, you will never stumble. With her protecting you, you will not be afraid. With her leading you, you will never tire. Her kindness will see you through to the end.²

As we make preparations to resume, albeit with restrictions, limited public Masses as early as May 18, most welcome news, we forge ahead in faith. We know that we cannot stay home forever; we know that watching Mass is not the same as being there. Nevertheless, we will take all prudent steps to ensure your safety, just as you ought to do the same.

For our valued senior parishioners, prudence may dictate that you remain in place a bit longer than many others. Even when Masses resume, the

¹ St. Jerome believed that the name Mary means "star of the sea." *De Nominibus hebraicis*. Rabanus Maurus † 780) uses the title "maris stella." The oldest manuscript in which the hymn *Ave maris stella* is found dates to the 9th century.

² St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Homily II, Homilies in Praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, pp. 30-31.

obligation to attend will not be in force, at least initially. I will update with more protocols in our next bulletin, as well as in an online update.

And since today's liturgy includes a composition by St. Hildegard of Bingen, Doctor of the Church, I add this brief prayer of hers about Mary:

*O greening branch
You stand in your nobility
Like the rising dawn
Rejoice now and exult
And deign to free the fools we are
From our long slavery to evil
And hold out your hand
To raise us up.*

On this Mother's Day weekend, we turn to Mary our Mother, but also to Mary our Protectress. She will raise us up; she will lift our spirits and direct them towards our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Why? For one reason- so that we will know him better, and thus serve him better.

"Have you been with me all this time Philip and you still do not know me?" The Lord's question in today's Gospel betrays his own dismay and one senses disappointment. There will always be misunderstanding and even failure in the mission of the Gospel. This is why it is all the more important for us to ensure that we know Him. Right now, we do this through a regular life of prayer, especially the rosary and spiritual reading.

It is always a sure sign of the Holy Spirit when the Church gathers in prayer, centered on Jesus Christ. To truly "know him," requires willingness on our part to listen, to trust in the Holy Spirit's guidance and to remain docile to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, worshipping in Spirit and in Truth. In Jesus we find our source of Hope. May Christ our Light be our guide, and may Mary, Star of the Sea guide us safely to port.