

Archbishop Smith: Who's to Know?

Last week I was on retreat with the priests of the Archdiocese. Our days of prayer and reflection were led by Archbishop Philip Tartaglia of Glasgow, Scotland. With the heart of a true pastor and wisdom of a great theologian, he helped us to reflect upon and renew our commitment to Jesus Christ as priests.

Among the many talks he gave us, one focused upon the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the life of the priest. He recounted one episode from his own life, in which it was very clear to him how the Blessed Mother intervened to help him. Then he added the question, which has since stayed with me: "Who's to know how else the Mother of God has been accompanying and helping me at every other moment of my life?"

Indeed. As children grow and engage with the mystery of life, their mothers naturally surround them with love and protection, care for their needs, and prepare the way for them in ways that they often do not know or appreciate. As Mother of Jesus and Mother of the Church, Mary is our mother, too. Even though we may not know or see how, she is surely watching out for us and interceding with her Son, Jesus, for our great good.

September 8th is the day set aside by the Church to celebrate the Birth of Mary. Falling this year on a Sunday, this memorial was superseded by the mass of the day, so we might have missed it. In point of fact, it is helpful to recall the maternal help of Mary as we consider the Gospel narrative that was proclaimed.

In the passage (cf. Luke 14:25-33), Jesus speaks of the cost of discipleship. To follow Jesus means taking up our individual crosses; it involves, in other words, daily self-sacrifice, a death to self. This is not easy. In the matter of following her Son, Mary gives us not only the help of her prayers but also the example to imitate. The perfect disciple, Mary gave herself entirely to the will of God by sacrificing herself for the One in whom that will was both revealed and fulfilled: Jesus. We know that this meant for her a real death-to-self, a deep suffering, particularly as she stood at the Cross.

From that same Cross Jesus gave his mother to the Church as our own: "Woman, behold your son." (John 19: 26). Since that moment, the Church has always turned to her, as children to their mother, for her help in all circumstances. Mothers come to the rescue when their children are in need. Mary does the same for us.

The priests on retreat were invited to reflect upon their relationship with the Mother of our Lord. Perhaps we could all receive that same invitation as addressed to us. Do we think of Mary? Pray to her? If not, now is a good time to begin. We will not always know how she is assisting us, but we are sure that she does. As she once said to St. Juan Diego, "Am I not here who am your

mother?" That is an assurance, which brings great peace.