

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It must be somewhere in the neighborhood of twenty years since we erected the statue of our Blessed Mother in front of the parish center. It was on this feast day of her Assumption into heaven that we blessed and dedicated it to the memory of the children in our parish who had died.

As I prepared my homily for that occasion and meditated on the meaning of the feast, I was blessed with a different view, or vision, if the will, of Mary. Over the years I have revisited that homily a number of times with you on this feast day simply because it still speaks to me of the joy of this moment in the life of Mary. As I've grown older, it also speaks to me of perhaps the joy that will one day be ours. So, please forgive me if you've heard it before, and indulge me as I share it with you one last time.

The Mary of my vision was not the beautiful young woman of statues and icons and paintings. No, the Mary I envisioned was a widowed, senior citizen. Somehow, it seemed to me, she lived a very long time after Jesus' suffering, dying, and rising. I believe she understood that when Jesus spoke to her from the Cross, "Woman, there is your son", referring to John, and to John, "There is your Mother," He meant for her to mother his disciples, to mother His Church into existence. And so she did—she did as He wished. But she did all that mothering with the heavy heart of a widowed mother who had lost her only child.

I saw Mary living, quietly alone for those many years, visited from time to time by Peter, James, John, and the rest of them. Always when they came, they would ask about Him. What was he like as a child? That's what the physician, Luke, was most interested in—the story of his birth, his early life. Oh, how Mary loved telling the stories. How she delighted in recounting the smallest details—like how Joseph woke from a dream telling her they had to flee to Egypt to protect Him; then later, how they had lost him on the way home from Jerusalem and how frightened she and Joseph were as they raced back in search of him. She loved telling the stories and the disciples loved hearing them and some wrote them down.

Then, they would leave and she would be all alone again—with her memories, with her sadness, with her pain. And she waited.

The years passed quickly it seemed. She never thought that she would live all those years so terribly alone. But she kept on mothering—the disciples, the infant Church. The memories never left her; nor the sadness; nor the pain. And she waited.

The years brought their own hardships. Arthritis had set in. She could no longer straighten her gnarled fingers and her back was bent from years of hauling all those buckets of water from the well. She was a little wobbly on her feet now, nowhere near as strong as they were when she and Joseph fled into Egypt with the infant or ran a full-day's journey back to Jerusalem in search of their son. And she waited.

Then, near the end of a hot summer day, not unlike today, she dozed off in the evening breeze, she woke with a start. She thought that she heard a familiar voice. "Oh, I must have been dreaming," she thought. But, then she heard it again. "It sounded so much like...but no, it couldn't be. Am I hallucinating?"

Then, all of a sudden, there he was. "Mother! Come home! Come home with me!" He took her hand and her fingers straighten and her hands were young again. As she got to her feet, her back was straight and strong and she was walking, or was she running, or dancing? And someone took her other hand—"It's Joseph! Dear, dear Joseph!"

"Where are we? What is this? Choirs are singing! Shouts of jubilation! ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!"

Jesus and Joseph escort her into what looks like an enormous concert hall, with tiers and tiers of balconies and an enormous shout goes up, choirs, sing, alleluias ring, and the melody of a thousand symphonies rise up in harmony as they approach a throne shrouded as in a cloud and the Divine Presence of the All-High, the All-Holy, the Almighty One moves toward her. Mary falls to her knees, along with Joseph, and the whole multitude of saints and angels surrounding them. From the approaching cloud, a crown is placed on her head, and Jesus takes her hand and she stands, and is revealed as John speaks of her in Revelations: "clothed with the sun, with a moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars".

Again, a crescendo of jubilation! Heaven finally has her Queen. ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!

Mary no longer waits—for Jesus. But still she waits. She waits for us, because you see, we, all of us, yes, we are still her children. And Mary waits.