

Jn 19: 25-27

And standing by the Cross of Jesus his mother, and the sister of his mother, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary, the Magdalene. Jesus, therefore, seeing his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing by, said to his mother: “Woman, behold thy son.” Then, he said to the disciple “Behold thy mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own (home).

This very well-known text is one of the most important Marian passages in Scripture. Mary is present at the foot the Cross, not only as a loving mother, but also as a disciple who follows her Master unto the hour of His exaltation by the Father. He is the obedient Son unto death, and death on the cross.

I want to highlight some words in the text that can reveal some aspects that may have been overlooked, and some other aspects that can be seen in a new perspective.

1) In the original Greek, the verb *histemi*, which means “straighten up,” “stand,” is present in three words: *eistéekesav*, *staurós*, *parestóota*

a) The first appears when the evangelist narrates that the mother, the other women, and the beloved disciple “standing” by the cross.

b) The second appears in the word “cross,” *staurós* in Greek. The word itself has its roots in the verb *histemi*.

c) Finally, it appears when the beloved disciple is described as “standing by the mother.”

Placing ourselves in the scene, we can see Jesus, three women, and the beloved disciple. They are five persons altogether. They are joined by the love they have for the one that is on the cross. We could say that love convoked them to be present at a painful hour, just as we would also like to be present near a beloved one’s deathbed. Only those that love the one in pain have the courage to be at his/her side. Suffering is not something that attracts us. Love has to be mature or intrepid, like the love of young people.

When confronted by suffering, it is hard to stay firm, that is, to “stand.” We are not just talking about the physical aspect, but the spiritual one, especially for a mother who is watching her son die.

Hence, this passage is saying something profound about love and suffering.

2) Standing is the witness position. The word for witness in Greek is *martys*. A witness is ready to testify whatever the consequences may be, even if he/she has to give his/her own life. For Jesus standing on the cross is the witness of the love of the Father for Himself and for humanity. He testifies by willingly giving His own life on the cross, as we read in Jn. 10:17-18: “The Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own free will; and as it is in my power to lay it down, so it is in my power to take it up again; and this is the command I have been given by my Father.” In the same solemn moment, Jesus’ disciples are the witnesses of Jesus’ love for the Father and for us, fulfilling His Father’s will.

3) The youngest eyewitness mentioned in this text, according to tradition, is St. John. As a young man, he takes risks courageously. He follows Jesus to the end, that is, to the foot of the Cross. He is standing firmly by the cross and by the mother of Jesus.

Young people are strong, firm, and courageous, so it is not a coincidence that the disciple at the foot of the cross is the youngest one. Jesus, it is said in the text, has a special love for this disciple. Because he is the youngest, still an adolescent, we can make a connection with Jesus' words in Mt. 19:14: "Let the little children alone, and do not stop them coming to me; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs."

What defines these young ones who come to Jesus? What do they see in Jesus that compels them to follow Him? Who is stopping them? These are interesting questions that we could ask ourselves in the pastoral ministry, so let us actualize the text Jn. 19:25-27 from a youth's point of view. One answer could be that, once young people understand the importance of following the teacher, they take the necessary risks to fulfill a mission.

Children and teenagers want their teachers to be proud of them. They want to be good disciples. St. John at the foot of the cross could have had the words of Jesus in his: "Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me" (Mt. 10: 38). As we can

see in the text, John is perfectly fulfilling his responsibilities as a disciple. He followed his Master. He is worthy of Jesus.

4) We cannot forget that Mary is not just a mother, she is a Jewish one. As a Jewish mother, she knows that her role is not only to be a loving mother for her children, but also their teacher. The evangelist places the disciple standing by the mother. His testimony accompanies Mary's testimony. She is also a disciple that follows her Son to the cross. She is giving her spiritual sons and daughters the example of a firm witness who follows the Master's footsteps.

5) Standing is also the posture of prayer in Jesus' culture and time. Jesus teaches his disciples to be in constant prayer. Mary, the other women, and the beloved disciple are doing what their Master teaches. Jesus Himself is praying. As we already know, when Jesus says on the cross "My God, my God why have you deserted me?" (Mt 27:46), it corresponds to Psalm 22:1.

Prayers are important when you have to see your loved one suffering and you cannot do anything to stop it. Jesus, Mary, the other women, and the beloved disciple are praying and offering their pain to God. Of course, Christ is the *oferente* par excellence. He is not alone, however,

there are some who are with Him, some who want to participate in His mission: His mother, the women, and the youngest disciple.

6) Just one more aspect about the verb *histemi*. Standing is also the posture for listening to the Gospel. When we listen to the Gospel, we are witnesses in the world of what is proclaimed. We affirm that what we hear is true, and we are ready to give our lives for that truth. John, standing by the cross, represents the love that we have for the Master, our Lord Jesus Christ.

7) Another interesting word to analyze in this text is the word *horao* which means “to see,” “to observe,” to perceive.” The verb *horao* is present three times in Jn. 19:25-27:

- a) Jesus sees His mother and the disciple.
- b) Jesus asks His mother to see the disciple.
- c) Jesus asks the disciple to see His mother.

Jesus sees that His mother and the disciple have followed Him to His cross. They are firm witnesses of His love for humanity. He will start a dialogue with them, but before he uses words to address them, He starts a dialogue with the eyes.

8) Directing His sight to them, Jesus penetrates into their hearts having intimacy with His mother and with His disciple. Jesus knows what is inside of both of them. He knows them well. He always knew that they would be there with Him, and now, by the cross, they are in fact with Him. By bearing the suffering at His side, now they are ready to be called to a new mission.

9) The Greek word *horao* corresponds to the Hebrew verb *ra'a*. Among other meanings, the Hebrew word can mean the following: “discover,” “experience,” “examine,” “receive,” “observe carefully,” “care for,” “visit.”

Unlike other verbs referring to visual perception, *ra'a* denotes the experience of seeing sensation and perception merged together as a totality.

10) When Jesus says “behold thy son” and “behold thy mother,” He is calling them to place themselves face-to-face and contemplate each other. His mother is a gift from Jesus to the disciple, but also the disciple is a gift that comes from the heart of Jesus to His mother. The new mission is to establish a new relationship between the mother and the disciple.

11) The verb *ra'a* sometimes comes together with verb *shama* "hear." *Shema* is the imperative form of the verb *shama*, and it is the first word of the Jewish creed. Two verbs having to do with the senses are involved, to see and to hear. Because these verbs are used to describe people who are standing, the posture of witnesses, the passage can be interpreted as portraying His mother and the beloved disciple as committing their entire being to Jesus.

The mother and the disciple are looking at Jesus and waiting for Him to talk. They are not just looking, but hearing what He says, what He will proclaim. They are ready to record in their hearts the precious treasure of what He will say.

12) Another Greek word that I want to focus on is the verb *lego* that means "say," "speak," "command." The verb appears twice in the text:

- a) Jesus "says" to His mother,
- b) then He "says" to His disciple.

In the creation narrative when God "says," it comes to exist. When God was creating the World, "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was

light” (Gn. 1:3). The narrative states that after God sees light, He said that it was good.

Jesus mother becomes the real mother of the disciple, and the disciple becomes her real son. A new family comes to exist, according to what Jesus “says.” And, this must be good, according to what we observed about God’s speech in the creation narrative.

13) Finally, I would like to say something about the verb *lambano* which means “take,” “take to oneself,” “take possession of.” John, the youngest disciple, hearing what Jesus asked of him, takes Jesus’ mother as a new mother of his own. After they contemplate each other, standing by the cross, he takes her into his intimacy and gives her a place in his home. In other words, he joins his heart to hers to establish an intimate union with her, and he gives her his own heart as a place to live in.

CONCLUSIONS

- 1) In order to take Mary to our homes, we need to know her.
- 2) To know Mary is to follow her.
- 3) Standing by Mary at the foot of the cross, we become sons and daughters of Mary.
- 4) A son and a daughter of Mary is a witness to Jesus' cross and resurrection.
- 5) Young people are strong, firm, and courageous, and they are willing to follow Jesus to the cross, accompanying Mary, if they understand their mission.
- 6) At the foot of the Cross, Jesus asks His mother and His disciple to contemplate each other, in other words, penetrate each other's heart and live in an intimate relationship with one another.
- 7) After a deep contemplation, the disciple eagerly takes Jesus' mother to his home.