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**MARY AS ICON OF EVANGELIZATION
BY FATHER VIRGILIO ELIZONDO**

BEHOLD YOUR MOTHER

(JOHN 19:27)



I grew up in a very Marian based Christo-centric tradition. From my earliest memories I remember beautiful Marian prayers like the *Memorare*, the many joyful hymns to Mary, pilgrimages, beautifully decorated home altars with her image, rosary devotions and lavish parish celebrations in her honor. We (those of us in this tradition) loved her because she was the mother of Jesus and our mother. Some have questioned our love of Mary reminding us that Christ alone is necessary for salvation. This is very true but is it not also the case that some of the most beautiful and treasured gifts in life are not necessary. The gifts of love are not necessary, and that is precisely why they are so precious.



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Amazing but not surprising. Jesus left the best for the end. Throughout his life, he was always thinking of others and even offered his life on the cross for our salvation. His entire life was one of multiple gifts – the gift of his teaching, his healings, his feeding of the masses, his joy of table fellowship with anyone and everyone, his free conversation with women and even the gift of his own Body and Blood. At the very core of his life and message, he taught us to pray to God as our Father and invited us into intimacy with God as a loving father.

It seems that just before uttering the final word from the cross, proclaiming that his work was now successfully completed (John 19:30), Jesus realized that there was still something missing from his redemptive mission. He came to initiate a new family based not on blood bonds but on the bonds of love (Matt 12:46-50). His entire life was expressive of unconditional love based upon intimacy with God who is love. He shed his blood so that blood would no longer be the dividing factor among individuals and nations.

Could there ever be a new family of humanity without the tenderness and loving heart of the mother who never abandons us, who will be ever at our side no matter what? Mary was such a mother. She not only gave birth to Jesus but accompanied him to the bitter end on the cross. Can you imagine her pain at seeing her beloved son betrayed by one of his trusted followers, abandoned by his closest friends, and condemned by the leaders of her beloved religion. The nails through the hands and feet of Jesus must have pierced her own heart as the thorns of the crown on his head must have dug into her mind and shattered it with incomprehensible violence as she witnessed the cruel end of a life dedicated to love and compassion.

As Jesus was nearing the climatic moment of his life, and still thinking not of himself but of us, he looked down from the cross, the throne of his cathedral, and saw the very small group of faithful flowers centered around his mother. “Women, behold, your son.” Then he said to the disciple whom he loved “Behold your mother” and the gospel goes on

to say: “And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.” (John 19:27-27). The disciple is not named because that disciple is you and I, it is every faithful follower of Jesus who takes up the cross and follows him on the way. But there is more. The Gospel states that from that hour, the disciple took her home – there is no Christian home without Mary at the center of that home. Mary is the precious treasure of our homes

Mary conceived Jesus in her womb, gave him birth, nourished him with her mother’s milk, gave him his first lessons on the love of God, launched him on his mission at Cana, accompanied him in life and was a faithful follower unto the cross. At the cross, the ever loving, understanding, compassionate, tender and faithful mother of Jesus now becomes our mother, the mother of all disciples. At the final and most sacred moment of his earthly life, as he enters the hour of his glorification, Jesus gave us the most tender gift of all. In life he had given us the Our Father but now, at the final moment, he gave us *our* Mother.

At the cross, Mary passes from being the mother of Jesus to being the mother of the new family of Jesus that is composed of all who listen to the Word of God, receive it into their hearts and put it into practice in their daily lives (Matt 12:46-50). As such she is the mother of the Church and in a very special way the listening and compassionate mother of each and every member of the Church. She reigns not just on altars, shrines and stained glass windows but even more so in the hearts and homes of all disciples. She continues to be the encouraging mother in moments of distress, the accompanying mother in moments of loneliness, the affirming mother in moments of rejection and self-doubt, the compassionate mother in moments of affliction and misfortune and the mother of unconditional love at all times.

With these totally unexpected and incredibly beautiful words Jesus completes his task on earth. “It is finished.” (John 19:30). He has triumphed over the most cruel powers of evil through the power of unlimited love and what a tender, loving and compassionate way to bring his work to completion; by giving us his own mother to be our mother. No wonder that Mary has such a deep place in the hearts and homes of Christians—for she is the precious and totally unnecessary gift bestowed by Christ upon the cross. At the hour of glorification Mary becomes our mother.

