

ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY YEAR C 2010

(Revelation 11: 19a, 12; 1-6a, 10ab; 1 Corinthians 15: 20-27; Luke 1: 39-56)

CAN WE SEE LIKE GOD (AND MARY)?

A Jewish writer named Chaim Potok in his book entitled *The Gift of Asher Lev* (1990) has this passage: "My father, of blessed memory, [once spoke to me about] the verse in Genesis [that goes like this]: 'And God saw all that He made and He saw that it was very good.' My father [said about this scripture] that the seeing of God is not like the seeing of man. Man sees only *between* the blinks of his eyes. He does not know what the world is like *during* the blinks. Man sees the world in pieces, in fragments. But the Master of the Universe sees the world whole, unbroken. *That* world is good. Our [human] seeing is broken, [my son] Asher Lev. Can we make it like the seeing of God? Is that possible?" [p.100]

Indeed, is it possible for us to have the sight of God? The church teaches that, by grace, Mary saw the world like God because she was sinless and was thus able to see the world whole and to do only the good in response. But what about us – why could we not also have the seeing of God?

The challenge is that we tend to put people like Mary who do "great things" on pedestals. For example, we think we can never be as holy as Mother Theresa or as courageous as the police and firefighters who lost their lives in the World Trade Center or as principled as Mahatma Gandhi. And we also think that we cannot possibly be as close to God as Mary. But it was God who gave all these people the strength to do those "great things" that Mary speaks about in the *Magnificat* in today's Gospel from Luke. And this includes Mary. She could never have been the mother of Jesus and, as we believe, the Mother of God or be the great model of what it means to be a disciple or, for that matter, be assumed into heaven without God's grace.

But even though we tend to think of Mary as beyond us, this Feast reminds us that God will do "great things" for all of his beloved people. And this certainly includes us. The way God sees the world, during the blinks, allows him to show mercy to all the faithful and to look upon all the lowly with favor and to promise a share in his divine life to all the disciples of Jesus. Like Mary, we also receive "great things" from God as listed in the *Magnificat* or "Mary's Song" in today's Gospel.

Mary was a simple maiden from Nazareth; a woman who gave birth; a wife who cared for her home and family; a refugee in a foreign land; a caring relative who visited her pregnant cousin Elizabeth (as related today by St. Luke); and she was also a mother who worried and suffered. Mary is certainly not "beyond us" in any of these ordinary everyday ways. Her sinless life was the fruit of her seeing like God, during the blinks, so that she remained faithful despite the terrible things that happened to her and her family and despite the great sacrifices she had to make. Mary is our model of fidelity and trust. As Elizabeth says in today's Gospel, Mary is blessed because she believed that God's word to her through the angel would be fulfilled. She trusted that she would bear the savior. Her seeing during the blinks permitted her to be in union with God and allowed her to let her deeds be exactly God's deeds. And this is why God assumed her into heaven when she came to the end of her life.

As Luke says, Mary remained with Elizabeth “about three months.” But she remains with the church (with us) for all time. She remains with us as Mother and Model. She remains with us to teach us not to see as sinners do – between the blinks. She remains to guide us to see the world not as broken but as whole and one with the Creator through the Redeemer. Above all, she teaches us that discipleship involves mercy because she is the Mother of Mercy. To be merciful means to see everyone in the way we hope God sees us – with compassion. To see as Mary sees (and as God sees) is to see the human dignity of every human being from the baby in the womb to the person on his/her death bed. No one is too “lowly” or “unimportant” or even too sinful to deserve our respect and understanding. Mary herself was as “lowly” as they come (as she herself says in her Song) and so she does not belong on a pedestal. She belongs with the most humble of God’s servants and maybe this is why she has appeared throughout history to the littlest of us all – to the poor and oppressed at Guadalupe, at Lourdes, at Fatima.

To see as Mary sees means not judging others. Mary knows, like all the saints, that God is more merciful to us than we often are to each other. To see during the blinks means seeing such exalted dignity in every human person that we refrain from any negative comments about them. Diminishing others diminishes us. The mystery of Christ’s passion and death and resurrection (the Paschal Mystery), if we truly enter into it, enables us to see everyone as equally valued and blessed by God.

So is it possible to see as God sees? To say no means we are saying that sin is necessary as part of human life. And this is what our culture teaches us: you have to sin to be human. But this view perverts our dignity as creatures made in God’s likeness. Mary could see as God sees and she teaches us the way of holiness and a sinless life. In doing this, she points to her Son who, let us remember, was also human and lived his glorious life without sin. Is it possible to see as God sees? The alternative is brokenness and fragmentation and hatred and revenge and violence. It is true that, as the church teaches, Mary was given extraordinary grace; but please recall the church also teaches that God gives each of us the grace we need to avoid sin – otherwise He is just toying with us. Mary, assumed into heaven, shows us that we can see as God sees if we let him do “great things” for us by opening our hearts to his grace – and by opening our eyes to see during the blinks.