



**Most Reverend Raymond J. Boland**  
**Bishop Emeritus**  
**Diocese Kansas City ~ St. Joseph**

**The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre**  
Annual Mass Honoring Our Lady of Palestine  
Monday, April 30, 2007

Readings from the Mass of Our Lady of the Cenacle

First Reading : Acts 1: 6-14  
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 87: 1-2, 3 and 5, 6-7  
Gospel: Luke 8: 19-21

"The Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary" does not provide us with a Mass text specifically associated with the title, "Our Lady of Palestine" but there is a Mass formula dedicated to "Our Lady of the Cenacle" which is most appropriate for this occasion. The liturgical season, at this time basking in the euphoria of the resurrection and contemplating the birthing of the infant Church also provides us with a wonderful context to meditate on God's gift to us of the humble Palestinian woman who became the Mother of God and is the Mother of the Church.

There is an amazingly detailed sixth century floor mosaic known as the Madaba map which clearly illustrates the buildings and infrastructure of the old city of Jerusalem as it existed during the Byzantine period. Keeping in mind that the city walls in the area of Mount Sion were frequently destroyed, rebuilt and often relocated during the early Christian centuries, one can still identify the Tower of David and the building which shares two names. It is called the Tomb of David although David is not really buried there and it is also known as the Cenacle, a word which owes its origin to the Latin word COENACULUM which literally means DINING ROOM . There is an ancient tradition that the house which stood here in Christ's time belonged to Mary, the mother of John Mark, the eavesdropper in the Garden of Gethsemane who had to relinquish his sleeping robe (Mark 14:51) to escape the soldiers who had come to arrest the Savior. John Mark later became the author of our second Gospel.

There is no unanimity among Christian scholars as to whether or not the so-called Upper Room housed both the Last Supper and the Pentecost event. Many are dubious that it was the location of the Lord's final meal with his apostles before the crucifixion but most would hold that the Cenacle was the place where the disciples prayerfully prepared for the promised coming of the Holy Spirit.

Mary, Christ's mother, had a life before she ever visited the Cenacle. Mary had achieved an intimacy with the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation which is beyond all human comprehension. In our most popular Marian prayer we address her as "*gratia plena*," "full of grace," for so indeed she is. God paused, as it were, and all heaven stood still as her unprecedented response of faith and courage bestowed upon this unique Palestinian teenager the equally unique vocation of the Christ bearer. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

Luke, whom Dante called "the gentle scribe of God," was in many ways Mary's biographer. He deals with the turbulent aftermath of the Savior's birth in Bethlehem , but when the Holy Family returns to Nazareth a veil of silence descends upon their everyday lives. It is broken only once when Jesus

goes missing during his twelve year old Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem , an incident which confirms the uniqueness of this young man in the experience of his parents, the Temple teachers and all of us. We are told that with great docility he went home to his hilltop town and was obedient to his mother and foster father. Indeed their life in Nazareth was so ordinary and outwardly unusual that when Christ began his public ministry the townsfolk refused to acknowledge the new role of their former neighbor. "Is he not one of us," they claimed, "we know his kith and kin; where does he get these ideas?"

And yet it would be a mistake to dismiss the so-called "hidden life" as inconsequential. It constituted, in many ways, Mary's finest hour in the peaceful opportunity God gave her to nurture her son. She did everything for Jesus which every mother does for her child. She fed him, protected him, answered his questions and opened his mind and heart to the world around him, as like all young men, he gradually relinquished his youth and reached towards adulthood. It is impossible to fathom the various nuances of divinity and humanity which constituted the personality of Jesus but, in later years, the methodology he used to bring the message of salvation to friends and strangers betrayed the keen observation he had developed under Mary's guidance, to understand the religious beliefs, the customs and the culture of the people among whom he choose to live and die. One prime example of his many insights can be gleaned from the content of his parables where we are allowed to penetrate the workaday world of farmers and fishermen, soldiers and shepherds, treasure hunters and tax collectors, housewives and children. And they collectively represent all the aspirations and ailments of our weakened human nature from which we need him to redeem us. The challenge was embedded in his society just as it is in ours. This man, whom Paul tells us laid aside all the trappings of divinity and was by sin untouched, nevertheless in his daily rounds came face to face with greed and generosity, self-righteousness and humility, scorn and sorrow, great faith and vacuous indifference, tender love and bitter hatred and all these followed him, as Mary did, to the cross. We cannot and should not underestimate the role that Mary played in the education of her son. God honored this lady of Palestine not only by selecting her as the mother of his son but also by allowing her the privilege of preparing him for his redemptive ministry. When next you reread the account of what happened at Cana you will notice that the Lord allowed himself to anticipate the beginning of his public life by allowing her to alter his plans. Maybe it was his way of saying, "thank you." After all, he knew she would have to endure much separation and suffering in the few years that remained for him.

There is a tendency for many to surmise that Mary's role ended with the classical image of the Pieta when she lovingly received the mangled body of her son into her arms beneath the cross. She is hardly mentioned in the Resurrection and Ascension narratives but we do, of course, imitate the early Church in our belief in her bodily assumption into heaven, a doctrine which only attained definition status in 1950.

There is one critical line in today's first reading which should dispel all doubts about Mary's role in the days before Pentecost and surely thereafter. Once again it is Luke who places her in the center of all that is happening. Following the Lord's directions and with a growing realization of the integrity of his promises, the apostles, all eleven of them specifically mentioned by name, come to the Cenacle, the Upper Room, and there they "devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some woman, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers." (Acts 1:14 )

Mary was there; in prayer; in anticipation of the coming of the Holy Spirit. She had personally experienced all this before as she awaited the birth of Jesus. Naturally, she was present when her child was born and she nurtured his infancy and his maturing. Now she would be present once again to nurture the infancy and the growth of his other body, the Church. She would enter another hidden

life, as it were, as the disciples, endowed with the gifts of the Spirit, fearlessly proclaimed the good news which their countrymen had tried to suppress in the execution of their leader. We must never minimize the power of the Holy Spirit but it would not be inappropriate for us to believe that Mary's influence and especially her example had something to do with the transformation of the apostles from the terror-stricken men who could not stomach Calvary to the determined zeal-driven missionaries who proclaimed Christ crucified and now rejoiced "that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of his (Christ's) name" (Acts 5:41). The Evangelist John, her new son, was the principal beneficiary of her influence but, conscious that grace cannot be restrained, we can conclude that her steadfastness beneath the cross, from which so many of the Apostles were conspicuously absent, endowed them with the backbone to go forth and make disciples of all nations.

As Mary had prepared herself for the reception of the Holy Spirit so now, in the Cenacle, perhaps more by her prayerful example than her words of advice, she prepared the minds and hearts of the disciples for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

In his address as he marked the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council Pope Paul VI called Mary the Mother of the Church specifically articulating a title which many believers had adopted over the centuries. This means that even though we acknowledge the ancient tradition that her earthly existence came to an end in Ephesus we also know that the nurturing of her son's Church continues without diminishing. Her assent given to Gabriel at Nazareth was an eternal commitment.

If we only think of Mary as spiritually "mothering" the Church as a whole we may fail to realize that her special care also extends itself to each one of us individually. As members of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher we have taken on a corporate responsibility for the pastoral care of Christians in Palestine. As individual Catholics we need her, as the disciples discovered, every step of our pilgrim way, to share our joy when we are happy, to console us when we experience grief, to care for us as she cared for Christ, in the intimacy of Nazareth and the loneliness of widowhood, or, as we so often say "now and at the hour of our death."

AMEN