

Cindy Bassett

# The Bible Corner



## Jeremiah's long scroll

Baruch placed his pen carefully aside before he looked up from the manuscript. The task at hand was difficult enough without the added burden of unnecessary mistakes. The prophet Jeremiah had dictated while Baruch had painstakingly transcribed every word. They had already been at it several days now.

"Finished, my friend?" Baruch asked, sighing with weariness.

"Not yet," Jeremiah said. "I still have a few more messages from God to His wayward people. Twenty years of preaching adds up to many words! Why the Lord still bothers with them at all, I don't know." His voice trailed off. "Please read the very beginning back, Baruch."

Baruch slowly rolled the long scroll back to the beginning of the text. Scribes were highly valued professionals, and Baruch's services were very much in demand. Few people in the entire country could read or write, yet some legal matter or other important business item always needed to be preserved. Baruch's services to Jeremiah, however, were entirely based on his long-standing friendship with the prophet.

"All right, Jeremiah, here it is: 'Thus says the Lord, to the people of Israel: Why have you deserted me now and turned away to worship these false gods? I made you my own special people when I brought your ancestors safely out of their slavery in Egypt. And now, here in the Promised Land, this is how you repay me? You have broken the covenant that your fathers made with me in the desert.'"

Baruch stopped abruptly. "So why do you continue after all this time?" he asked. "You have been beaten by your own priests, Jeremiah. And someday, the people will kill you for these words."

Jeremiah smiled wryly. "Yes, they may well kill the messenger, but the message I bring will never be destroyed. The Word of God will remain forever."

"I admire your courage, Jeremiah."

"I love God more than my own life! I can do nothing less as His servant," Jeremiah said. "Long ago, He promised to put His own words into my mouth. So it is not my words that you have been writing all of this time."

"Shall we continue then?" Baruch asked, smiling.

"Yes, and the work by writing: 'O Israel, there is still time to turn from these idols and come back to me. If I see your hearts filled with sorrow, then I will save you from destruction and do wonderful things for you. But if you refuse, I will abandon you to your enemies. They will

conquer you and you will become slaves again.'"

After Baruch finished writing, he rolled up the long scroll and prepared to go to the temple to read it. He went without his friend, for Jeremiah had been barred from entering the temple.

The temple was filled to capacity when Baruch arrived. It was a holy day in Jerusalem, and the people had come from all over the country to attend the services. Although they worshipped many gods, the people felt they had fulfilled their obligation to worship by coming to the temple.

Baruch stood before them and read Jeremiah's long scroll. When he had finished, many of the people were frightened and went in haste to the palace to inform the king's officials. King Jehoiakim's advisers decided to read the scroll to him, but they sent Baruch away.

It was a cold December day, and the king was sitting before a fire in his private chambers. "Now what is all this trouble about?" he asked, displaying a great deal of annoyance. "Is that crazy Jeremiah out stirring up people again? I should have exiled him long ago." He laughed heartily as he motioned for one of his advisers to read from the scroll.

King Jehoiakim's face remained expressionless and he offered no comment to any of the words as his official read. But after each section of the scroll was finished, the king took his pocket knife and sliced off the completed portion of the manuscript and calmly tossed it into the fire. He continued in this fashion until the entire long scroll had been destroyed.

The king smiled with a great deal of satisfaction as he turned to his advisers. "Arrest Jeremiah and the scribe, Baruch!" he commanded.

No harm came to the prophet or the scribe because the Lord protected them both. God told Jeremiah to make another scroll of all that He had said concerning His people. Together, Jeremiah and Baruch immediately set themselves to this task, but this time, the scroll was even longer.

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered the city of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. The city was burned to the ground; not even the walls remained.

God's words to Jeremiah remain today. They are found in the Book of Jeremiah in the Old Testament. Many people also attribute the Book of Lamentations to this prophet. And what of Jeremiah's faithful friend, Baruch? The Book of Baruch follows both of Jeremiah's books in the Bible.

Father Albert Shamon

# A Word for Sunday



## A mother's love

**Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 22:1-14; (R1) Isaiah 25:6-10; (R2) Philipians 4:12-14.**

After the Introduction to the Encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater*, the Holy Father entitles Part I "Mary in the Mystery of Christ." For he said, "only in the mystery of Christ is the mystery of Mary made clear" (#4).

The Council of Nicea (325) defined that Christ is "the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father" — the Nicene Creed.

Once it was clear who Jesus is, then the Church was in a position to make it clear who Mary is. The Council of Ephesus (431) defined that Mary was truly Mother of God — the *Theotokos*: the God-bearer.

This dogma put the seal on the Incarnation; for if Mary is truly the Mother of God, then the Son of God is truly Man — a truth denied by the Docetists.

St. Paul said in "the fullness of time" God sent His Son to a woman (Galatians 4:4). And she was "full of grace."

Mary was full of grace because she was chosen from eternity to be the mother of the Son of God — "a special place" (#7); because she was conceived in time without stain of sin — an immaculate conception (#10); and because at the Annunciation she was asked to be the mother of the "Son of the Most High" — grace itself.

God's blessings, however, demand human response. Elizabeth at the Visitation declared Mary blessed, precisely because of her response to the word of God at the time of the Annunciation (Luke 1:45).

At that time, Mary wondered at the angel's greeting, questioned his announcement and consented to his explanation. Her *fiat* — be it done to me — was decisive on the human level for the accomplishment of the divine plan of salvation (#13). Hers was the perfect response to the divine invitation. It was a total self-giving to God like that of a bride when she says, "I do."

The key to Mary's life, stressed in the encyclical, is in the one word "faith." Her blessedness consists, not so much in what God had done in her — her eternal election, her Immaculate Conception, her virginal conception — but rather in what she brought to these acts of God, namely, her faith.

Abraham's faith began the Old Testament; Mary's faith inaugurated the New Testament. Her faith was no mere fiducial feeling, nor even a mere intellectual assent. It was a total surrender of her total self — an "obedience of faith," matching the divine will as far as any creature's will could.

But her faith at the Annunciation was just the beginning of a life of faith, a journey of faith, which culminated at the

foot of the cross.

From the moment of the Annunciation, Mary was initiated into the radical newness of faith. In the Old Testament, God manifested Himself in great deeds — the *magnalia Dei*. He was Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

But at the Annunciation, He revealed Himself as a hidden God — a *latens Deitas* — to undo the pride of our first parents. What faith it took on Mary's part to believe that a child of hers was the Messiah! How difficult it must have been to believe that by just living an ordinary, everyday, hidden life in Nazareth for 30 years, He was redeeming the world (this is why the mysteries of the rosary are called mysteries). Mary pondered all these things in her heart.

Then at the presentation, she learned that He was to be a suffering Messiah — One who would assume the consequences of sin to redeem sinners. Peter was scandalized by such an idea (Matthew 16:22).

On the way of the cross, that same faith showed itself. How she must have longed to carry that cross like Simon, to wipe His face like Veronica! But she refrained, for she knew the Father's will, and she accepted it just as did her Son. But her prayers, I am sure, were what won from the Father the help of Simon and Veronica. For her part, she stood by the cross, like a tower of David.

Once a woman cried out to Jesus, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!" (Luke 11:27). Jesus replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:28). This was no putdown of Mary; rather it was a revelation of a new and deeper relationship than physical motherhood — namely, spiritual motherhood. Mary was blessed as the flesh-and-blood mother of Jesus; but she was more blessed, because of all persons none heard the word of God and kept it as she did. She conceived the Son of God first in her heart, then in her womb (#20). As a result, she merited another motherhood, that of all of us.

Thus from the cross Jesus said, "Woman, behold thy son." Jesus used the singular word "son," because she is given as the mother of each of us individually, one by one (#23). And "woman," because she is the woman of Genesis (3/5) and the woman of Revelation (12/1) — the one at the beginning and end of history.

But more important to us, she is the one present now, in this in-between time, to be mother to us as she was at Cana, responding to human needs.

Hence Jesus' last words, "Son, behold thy mother." Go to Mary, love her, look to her, follow her — our life, our sweetness and our hope!

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