

## Mary, Holy Mother of God

Mary was the key player in a centuries-old drama that is still running its course. By holding to her words "Let it be done to me according to your word", she turned history upside down. Her "yes to God" was not the stuttering response of insincerity, but rather a mature affirmation that cost her a lifetime of service. She was accepting and obedient but future events would prove her gallant and aggressive too.

Beginning with the birth of her Son, she must be counted among the homeless of the world. She did not tie her Boy to her apron strings and possessively hold on to him. Yet her Boy, though divine, was but clay in her sculptor's hands. From day one, she knew that many would try to rid themselves and the world of her Son. She did not always understand her restless Son, but she neither browbeat Him nor crushed His dreams.

She was not a contemplative nun; she was a full-time mother from early morning to late at night. She baked their bread each day and carried their water on her head in tall jars from a nearby spring. She studied His adventurous career with enthusiasm and endangered her own life by joining Him on His lecture engagements.

TIME magazine wrote that she knew His mission was doomed to failure, but she always sustained Him. Her Magnificat, spoken as a girl, reveals her even then as a revolutionary for the poor. The record will not allow her to be painted as a moderate.

She was with her Son when He was murdered and did not allow herself to be victimized by His assassins. Nor did she blame God for the death of her Son. After His Ascension, she stood alone, but she remained undaunted. She said yes to life every step of the way.

She needed no Women's Liberation, for she was already free. She was an uneducated peasant to the last and yet Harvard historian Henry Adams calls her "the most powerful religious symbol in all of Western history." Helen of Troy may have launched a thousand ships, but this little woman from Nazareth has surely launched a million painters. For twenty centuries, artists have saluted her with oils, marble, music, pen, and now word processor. The world's greatest artists have judged their work incomplete unless they had painted her on canvas. Mary is even revered in the Koran.

The English poet Wordsworth wrote of her as "our tainted nature's solitary boast." Gerard Manly Hopkins, an English Victorian poet, compared her to the "air we breathe." Coventry Patmore, an English poet, said she is our "only refuge from an abstract Christ." Flannery O'Connor, an American novelist, short story writer and essayist, said life without her would be similar to life without sleep. Ten centuries ago an obscure saint wrote "The one who does not think of the wants of the poor is not a member of the Body of Christ." St John Vianney said she will only allow herself rest after the last of her children has been saved.

Devotion to her has been fostered more by poets than by theologians. Though she was illiterate, no woman has had more volumes penned about her, nor more universities named after her. She is the only woman in its history to have appeared on the cover

of TIME magazine eleven times. The editors of TIME call her the most celebrated woman who ever lived. Our Saint Barbara's Knights of Columbus Council names her as the one to whom we turn to draw us closer to God.

And I became aware of Mary on a personal level when I was 7 years old and revere her to this very day.

How do you see her in your life?