

There are many more examples that we can think of, but the point is not that the women (and the men) that the Lord Jesus met were shallow in comparison to the Mother of God. Granted, there were many ways in which they would fall short of God's design. We too fall short of God's design for us. Nevertheless, there are many ways in which the Lord Jesus has given us certain qualities and graces that we can recognize as well in the Mother of God.

The Virgin Mary received all that she had from the Lord. It was the Lord who shaped her life and gave her the fullness of grace that she possessed. It was the Lord who made her the perfect model for our faith. The same Lord shapes us and gives us a share in His life and in His grace. We can see the grace that God gives us as something that we share with the Mother of God. We can see that the Virgin Mary shares much with us.

The Virgin Mary was free from inheriting original sin, but her sinlessness should not distress us. Her Immaculate Conception does not stand as a reminder that we *were* conceived in original sin. Her sinlessness is not a reminder of our sinfulness. The point is not to highlight our failures, but to inspire us to imitate her example. We need examples in many areas in our lives, and our spiritual lives are no different.

The Virgin Mary gives us an example of how to follow the Lord. She responds to God's plan for her by simply stating, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." She has no fear, she has no doubts or anything to hold her back from saying yes to God's plan. What would she be afraid of? Without sin or earthly attachments, there is nothing that she is afraid she will lose if she cooperates. Would she doubt that God really has the best intentions for her?

We know that we can rely upon her example. Without sin having a part in her life, there was nothing to give us a bad example. We know that we can look to her to know how to respond to God's will without fear, without worrying about what we might lose. We can learn from her faith, that we can have a trusting acceptance of God's will. We can learn from her humility and not be concerned about what's in it for ourselves.

As we approach this altar, we ask the Lord to help us to grow in grace. We ask the Virgin Mary to help us. She doesn't just provide an example for us to imitate, and then leave us alone to figure it out. When we struggle to accept God's will, or when we are worried about the future or when we need faith, she will be there to help us. She is our spiritual mother who will not hesitate to help us, just as she did not hesitate to say yes to God's will for her.

Rev. Derek Fairman

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

Every December 8th we celebrate the beginning of our redemption. We celebrate the morning star shining before the dawn. We celebrate the Immaculate Conception, when the Lord preserved the Virgin Mary from all stain of original sin. On this solemn feast, we think about how she is a model for us, and how much we rely upon her guidance. We can probably think of mentors and others that we look up to in our lives, and our spiritual lives are no different.

In the writings of Adrienne von Speyr, she imagines that the Lord Jesus saw something of His Mother and her qualities in the different women that He encountered in His Public Ministry. The idea is not that He measures them all against her, because none would compare. Rather, He sees in them, in some way, the brightness and purity of His Mother. In fact, as the Word of God through whom all things are made, it is He Himself who has created each person, and in some way, we can share in the perfection He has given to His Mother.

Take the example of Martha. When the Lord Jesus came to Martha's house and she was busy with the details of hospitality, she noticed her sister Mary listening to the Lord Jesus instead of helping her. Martha complained and asked the Lord Jesus to tell her sister to help. The Lord Jesus defended Mary, but He did not say, "Martha, my mother never complained about anything. Why can't you be more like her?"

No, in spite of her complaint, the Lord Jesus appreciated Martha's dedication to hospitality. Perhaps her hospitality was a reflection of the warm home that the Virgin Mary provided for the Lord Jesus. In fact, the Virgin Mary provided a home for the Lord Jesus in a lot of ways. We know that she absorbed the teachings of her Son, and so His words had a home in her heart. Since we now recognize Martha as Saint Martha, we know that the Lord Jesus' words found a home in Martha as well.

As another example, we might look at the widow of Nain. She lost her only son, and yet the Lord Jesus raised him from the dead and then gave him to his mother. This situation with the widow of Nain losing her only son would mirror His own mother's situation to come during His Passion and Death. No doubt that in the widow's anguish He could know the anguish and sorrow of His own mother. Yet He could also see in the widow not just sadness but strength, and this reflected His mother's strength through adversity as well. The Virgin Mary would see her Son again in His Resurrection just as the widow of Nain had received her son back.