

Mary's fundamental lesson for Christians

I would hope everyone has had a good experience or fond memories of their mothers. As we get older, it is always good to keep these fond memories from our childhood at the fore, and we find it important to go back home and visit with our mothers.

Some of us have our mothers here on Earth, while some of our mothers have already met their heavenly Father. Even so, our relationship with our mother is so strong that even when she is gone, it is always actual, always real.

We make a pilgrimage to a Marian shrine like ours, dedicated to Our Lady of Mariapoch, for one simple reason. We go there as sons and daughters to see our Mom, the Mother of God of Mariapoch. She is close to us all, but also close to all of our mothers, grandmothers, and parents in the faith who have come before us.

For all Ruthenian Byzantine Catholics, the Mother of God of Mariapoch is a special patron. Our heavenly Mother has a real relationship of care with us. For this reason, just as it is normal for us to go back home and say, "Thank you, Mom," we come to her shrine to say, "Thank you," and maybe even to say, "Mom, I have problems in my life; I need your help." This is human; this is normal.

We can bring problems to our Mother, because mothers — and fathers — are always the people from whom we can learn something new; but we can learn from them only if we have open heart.

The fundamental thing we can learn from the Mother of God of Mariapoch is how to listen to the Word of God. This is the most important thing we can learn as Christians: to be open and to learn about her Son Jesus Christ.

This must become our way. Only his Word can give us the true answers to the questions, doubts and problems that we may have. Many people in this world — even important people — try to offer us solutions, the easy way out. We need to be very careful about what the world proposes and see if it is really good for our souls.

We can gain insight about listening to the Word of God if we look at Mary's role in the life of Jesus.

The Mother of God was always at his side: in Egypt, when they were refugees; in the temple, when they found him after they thought he was lost; at Cana in Galilee, manifesting his glory at the wedding feast; when he was publically denied by the disciples; and at the hardest point of her life, at the foot of the cross, where she saw her own Son die. We must be close to her Son as she is close to him.

The Mother of God is also close to us, as members of the church. She was present from the church's beginning and she was there on Mount Zion, after the Ascension, when the Apostles were gathered as a community to pray as the new church.

The Troparion of the Dormition reminds us that even in her falling asleep, "she does not forsake the world."

For this reason, the Eastern Church has many prayer services to the Mother of God, which remind us of her continual care for every one of us in the church, as every mother wants the best for her children.

God bless you,
+ Bishop Milan

This text is based on the first part of Bishop Milan Lach's homily for the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy at the Shrine of Our Lady of Mariapoch Aug. 13.

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