

JOCELYNE'S RESOURCE-OF-THE-MONTH: May 2017

My Commentary on: "The Bible and the Virgin Mary" Bible Study: By the Saint Paul Center for Biblical Theology

Website Link → <http://www.bibleandthevirginmary.com>

True Feminism, Part 1: The Sacred Gift of Womanhood

This month, I have chosen to highlight a St. Paul Centre for Biblical Theology Bible study called: "The Bible and the Virgin Mary," which is offered via their website for free during the month of May, the month of Mary for Catholics. This month also marks the 100th anniversary of Our Lady's apparitions at Fatima. It will be a month to remember, I'm sure!

Upon reading the point of view of feminism presented here in my commentary, your first reaction may be to dismiss it, or automatically reject it. There was a time I would have done the same. I invite you to say a prayer asking God to reveal to you His truth, and simply consider these ideas. I challenge you to be open to another point of view.

I am extremely saddened by the state of women and girls worldwide and by the evils perpetrated against them. Let me be clear, these injustices (ie. child brides, genital mutilation, denial of education to women and girls, and other atrocities) need to be opposed! For this reason, a type of feminism is needed, a feminism that truly has the best interests of women and girls at heart. Our modern-day radical feminism is severely flawed, however, and is detrimental to women and girls. Please be patient with me as I explain how I came to this conclusion. I used to view modern-day feminism as good for women. I have changed my mind. I would like to share with you why...

Last month, I wrote of a deep and devastating emotional wound that weakened me spiritually and left a mess of anger and resentment in its wake. Another way that this wound impacted me is in the way I saw the world, specifically what it meant to be male and female. In fact, I had such a difficult time with my womanhood that, when I first learned that according to my faith I would be a woman forever, even in heaven, I cried bitterly.

"The Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God - it is not 'produced' by the parents - and also that it is immortal: it does not perish when it separates from the body at death, and it will be reunited with the body at the final Resurrection (CCC, paragraph 366)."

Therefore, my female body will be reunited with my soul at the end of time and I will spend my eternity a woman. This realization caused me a lot of grief because, in my eyes, as a woman I was "the second sex," lesser than and dominated by men, doomed to suffer simply because I am a woman. I wanted to go to a heaven where biological sex did not exist, where we would all be the same, where women could finally be equal to men!

My post-secondary education didn't help matters. I majored in French and English literature and studied a great deal of feminist writing in both languages. In my brokenness, I rejected my unique feminine nature and embraced the ideals of modern-day feminism. This is a feminism that pits women against men and renders the two enemies; a feminism that tells us that to have value, we need to be more like men; and for this reason, a feminism that teaches that child-bearing and child-rearing are "inconvenient" or a curse, a hindrance to our freedom and success. According to this view, contraception and abortion are, therefore, good for women. These ensure that a woman can be free to compete with men without being encumbered by her fecundity. Motherhood is looked down upon, discouraged. We are told to put our careers first, that our value is based on society's measure of our "success," in a world dominated by men.

So what is this gift of "unique feminine nature" that I referred to above? Perhaps it would be best to describe the situation that made this truth apparent in my life...

When I chose to marry, I wasn't particularly concerned with wearing a veil on my wedding day. It didn't fit with the style I wanted for my hair and, to be honest, I had subscribed to the idea that veils were just another symbol of the inequality of the sexes, or of the oppression of women. The very fact that men do not wear veils seemed to confirm this thinking.

A year after our wedding, my husband and I travelled to Portugal with some friends. While we were there, we visited Fatima, where the Virgin Mary appeared before three children, six times in 1917. I was moved by what I felt to be the presence of God where the children had seen His mother, Mary. I was also moved by the faith of the other pilgrims there, some of whom were proceeding on their knees, following a long, marble path to the Chapel of the Apparitions on site. I did not have any particular devotion to Mary at the time. I, actually, had difficulty relating to her, but I believe that she left an imprint on my heart while we were there and slowly, by the grace and direction of God, I have come to know His mother. She, in turn, has led me closer to her son (see my January commentary for more on that).

In January, I also mentioned that there were faith questions that caused my heart extreme disquiet. Some of these difficult questions centered around womanhood and the role of women. Admittedly, these are topics with which I have struggled for many, many years. When I finally knew in my heart of hearts that the Catholic Church holds the fullness of Truth, I knew I needed to accept and obey its teachings, but I struggled with understanding some of the teachings, many centered on womanhood, so I prayed: "Convince me, Lord."

After I prayed a novena for Our Lady's intercession in hope of answers, new insights about womanhood were slowly revealed to me. One of these insights concerned veils. Years after my wedding, I overheard someone mention that veils are used to cover 'holy objects.' Then I noticed that many tabernacles in Catholic Churches are veiled. These are holy dwelling places for Jesus in the Eucharist. This got me thinking...

Just as a beautiful gift is carefully wrapped in elegant paper, a woman's body and the beautiful God-given gift of the womb, is veiled in mystery. She has been given a unique gift, the ability to cooperate with God to bring forth life. This is the symbolism of the veil. A woman does not cover herself because she is hiding, being the inferior, no! Just as the Tabernacle is veiled because it is the dwelling place of Life Itself: Jesus in the Eucharist, women are traditionally veiled because we too are holy tabernacles of life.

Modern-day feminism, however, has taught us that children and childbearing are inconvenient, a curse to women. The Church, rightly teaches that a woman is a sacred vessel of life and has been given a very special gift from God, a gift that makes her different from a man, but equal nonetheless. Likewise, children are blessings from God. 'False feminism' seeks ultimately to strip women of her God-given gift and of her special, sacred ability to give life, and seeks to 'emancipate' her by making her just like men. This is why it is false and, frankly, insulting. This type of feminism denies the inherent dignity of the woman, telling her she is not ok unless she is like a man, her superior. It tells her to reject all that makes her woman. Not only is this impossible, but it worsens the condition of women. I'll speak more about this in my next commentary.

Women are mothers and motherhood is sacred! This does not mean that every woman must carry a child in her womb, nor does it mean she is less valuable if she is not a biological mother. Women are mothers, whether that be in the spiritual sense, the adoptive sense or in the biological sense, and this is valuable in every sense! This is why the Church values the vocations of marriage, consecrated single life and virginity equally!

My Catholic faith is the true cause of my emancipation! In accepting my unique and sacred femininity and by cherishing the gift that God has given me as a woman, I am truly free! I am at peace and I am happy!

Understanding and acceptance of my womanhood has come slowly. Often, after the gift of a new and comforting insight, more questions would arise. I would tell the Lord, "Thank You, however, I'm still not satisfied. What about ___? (Insert any number of questions relating to womanhood here) Please help me understand and come to a place of peace."

I believe that Mary has played an instrumental role in my life, interceding for me, so I could come to a place of peace and accept the God-given gift of womanhood. Learning about her and about how instrumental she is in God's plan for salvation has made a world of difference for me. It was by studying her and her importance that I began to accept and love my womanhood, to view it as it truly is: a gift from God. I am comforted by how much she is cherished by God and I am so glad that He is willing to share her with us. We have been blessed with Our Lady's example and the blessings are unceasing! In Her, we have an example of perfect womanhood. She is relatable. I didn't always feel this way. I felt the opposite actually. I couldn't relate to her because of her perfection and because of how far I am from achieving this end. However, I know now that it was the Evil One who planted this idea in my mind. He did not want me to achieve a close bond with my heavenly mother because he knew how profound an influence she could have on my life, how she could change me and bring me closer to God faster than I would have ever dreamed. Without her intercession, I would not be where I am today in my faith journey. It was Jesus that led me to her when I asked to know Him better. He told my heart that to truly know Him, I would need to know His mother. I owe her a great debt for all she has done for me, for her love.

“The Bible and the Virgin Mary” study is so rich and beautiful. It was part of my learning process and it has helped to make me so proud to be a woman. I encourage you to sign up by email for this amazing Bible study, which is a set of 12 videos and is free for the month of May. You can order the booklet to accompany the study if you so choose.

As Catholics, we have been wrongly perceived as Mary worshippers. This is a great misconception of the love and honour we devote to Mary as Mother of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. She is not a goddess. We honour, respect and love her because of her selfless sacrifice to God. She offered everything to God: her body, her soul, her will, and ultimately her life. Through her, God’s plan for our salvation was made manifest. She is the mother of the Christ. She is the Mother of our Lord and Saviour, the Mother of God. As we believe that Jesus is one hundred percent divine and one hundred percent human, this title is fitting. For if we deny her the title, Mother of God, we deny Jesus as part of the Trinity. Jesus is not only the Son of the Father, He is God. He is part of the Holy Trinity, One God. Mary is His Mother. One of the Ten Commandments specifies: “honor thy father and mother.” This Commandment is echoed throughout the Bible and in the Gospels many times. Jesus honors and profoundly loves His mother and Father, and wants us to do the same! By doing this, we show our love for Him. Let’s look at this in terms of a marriage. If a bride loves her mother-in-law and makes an effort to get along well with her and know her, this will strengthen her marriage. The husband will love his bride more dearly, be closer to her, as no family discord will come between them. We all want those we love to love our family, as we do.

May is the Month of Mary, my dear spiritual Mother and yours! She is the perfect example of the God-given value and sanctity of women. She is loving, nurturing, gentle, caring, selfless, a sacred vessel of life. Her fiat, her “Yes” to God, brought about our Salvation: Jesus! I would argue that women, therefore, have a very sacred and special role to play in salvation! We are indispensable! We give birth to and nurture God’s children! Let us ponder the grandeur of that role and let us sincerely celebrate women this month! On this 100th anniversary of the Blessed Virgin’s apparition at Fatima, Portugal, let us adopt a true feminism that recognizes the unique sacredness of women. Whether or not she has carried or will carry a child in her womb, she is life giving, special, holy, essential, loved and cherished by God, made in His image and likeness, man’s equal! Let us reject the notion that our value comes from being more like men! We are women! Let’s truly embrace our differences. We are made with unique and sacred gifts and I, for one, am honoured to share womanhood with the greatest saint to have ever lived: God’s own mother!

I hope that women reading this will feel empowered and come to know their God-given worth. I know, however, that many who read this will not be convinced. If this applies to you, I urge you to please open your heart and consider these ideas. Don’t accept what you’ve been taught about male and femaleness, but research it for yourself. You may want to start with my Resource-of-the-Month. I’ve been where you are. I didn’t get the Church teaching. I hadn’t taken the time to pray about it, and to study it and try to understand it. I rejected it, because I didn’t understand, because I had pre-conceived notions that I had learned from society and that had been engrained in my psyche. I prayed about this incessantly, begging God to help me understand, begging Him to show me where I fit in as a woman. This understanding did not come easily or quickly. Our Lord revealed things slowly, but I persevered in seeking the truth of the matter until I was satisfied and at peace.

Our Lord has kept His promise: “My child, if you accept my words and treasure up my commandments within you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; if you indeed cry out for insight, and raise your voice for understanding; if you seek it like silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures—then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God (Proverbs 2:1-5).” Thanks be to God!

Now that I have taken the time to study, pray about and understand another point of view, namely what the Catholic Church teaches, I see an unmistakable truth in it! It has set me free!

Your sister in Christ,
Jocelyne