

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Aug 22nd 2015

Memorial of the Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Weekly Guide for Daily Prayer

Today's readings, for Saturday of the 20th week in Ordinary Time, were not chosen to go with the memorial of the Queenship of Mary, which is linked to date, not the day of this particular week. As it happens, though, the readings interact with the memorial in some intimate ways. For one thing, the historical Ruth of Moab has a significant place in the genealogy of Joseph, and thus, of Jesus. Ruth's son, it turns out, is the grandfather of David. And she takes her place in that genealogy only because of her loving choice to accompany her widowed mother-in-law back to Bethlehem. And like the other women named in Matthew's genealogy—Tamar, Rahab, Bathsheba (“the wife of Uriah the Hittite”) and Mary—they enter the genealogy in extraordinary ways. Mary's entry was the most extraordinary, as she was made pregnant through the Holy Spirit. And whereas Jesus was son of Joseph as his legal father, he was son of Mary biologically. This genealogy works as an introduction to the gospel “book of the genesis” of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham, because it celebrates Mary's motherhood and Jesus' sonship as the climax of the history of the people of Israel.

The Gospel reading, the first dozen verses of Matthew 23, also suggests some fresh thoughts about the Virgin Mary and her Queenship. Jesus' call to observe the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees but not their practice, surely reflects what we know of her from the gospels, especially that of Luke. When, in Luke 11, the woman in the crowd shouted out “Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts that nursed you,” Jesus was quick to retort, “Rather blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.” Which, of course, was not a put-down of his mother but a declaration of what is most praiseworthy in her. So of course her son would council obedience to the Pharisees as interpreters of the word of God.”

When Jesus speaks of the things the scribes and Pharisees do, which are not to be followed, he highlights their love of the title “Rabbi” and he counsels his disciples against seeking such titles as Rabbi, and Father and Master, and that they are all really siblings of one another. Moreover the greatest among them is their servant. I have no doubt he got this from his mother. Her only self-designation is *doul?*, which appears twice in the Gospel, at Luke 1:8, “Behold, I am he handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word,” and at 1:48, “For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness.” So “handmaid” is the familiar translation of *doul?*. Because “handmaid” is used in modern English on these these gospel passages it has a special resonance. But the ordinary meaning of *doul?* is “slavegirl.” So in reference to herself, Mary was not into titles .

But we have found a need for titles—not usually as self-designations, of course, but as ways of honoring others. And Mary surely appreciates the Church's intention in honoring her with the title Queen, with

a meaning as special as applied to her as the title King has a special connotation as applied to Jesus, on the tablet over the cross. But one suspects she is pleased when the current bishop of Rome reminds cardinals that their titles are not tokens of honor but emblems of a special task in the service of the Church. And many of us adults in our day have titles that serve a purpose in our various cultures and workplaces. The teaching, by word and example, of Mary and Jesus, mandates us to wear those titles lightly, but to take seriously the service to which they call us.

Dennis Hamm, S.J.-Creighton University's Theology Department