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HUMBLE AND GREATEST CREATURE

Walking with Mary, teacher of Integral Ecology

3. Lookin at the world with wisdom

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Number 241 of the Encyclical '*Laudato Si'*', which Pope Francis dedicates entirely to the relationship between the person of Mary and the care of creation, concludes by highlighting in particular her ability to understand and guard the truest meaning of all things: "She not only keeps in her heart the whole life of Jesus, whom she 'guarded' with care (cf. Lk 2:19, 51), but also understands the meaning of all things. Therefore, we can ask her to help us look at this world with wiser eyes".

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The Wisdom books, moreover, happily depict Wisdom personified in a wise woman, expert in the things of life, who wishes to put her caring skills and knowledge at the service of the formation of the young (cf. Prov 8-9; Sir 24). At the beginning of chapter 9 of the book of Proverbs, in particular, the Woman of Wisdom is described as she goes in search of disciples: she seeks them out on the streets and in the squares, she sends for them through her handmaids to invite them to enter her House and share her table, that is, to receive from her what they need to live and to be happy.

These actions of the Woman of wisdom, immediately call to our memory some of Jesus' gestures and words, such as the gestures of the Eucharist (Mt 26:26); the parables in which a rich man gives a banquet and sends his servants to invite the people on the streets (Mt 22:1-14); Jesus' own invitation to his disciples: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28).

In his public ministry, in fact, Jesus took upon himself the traits of Wisdom personified by living and teaching as one who has received authority from God and who knows the way that leads to Life (Jn 14:6). Biblical Wisdom, however, is a female figure and this fact has allowed Christians, over the centuries, to recognise some traits of Wisdom personified also in the figure of Mary.

Why do the wisdom books give Wisdom a female face? Probably this identification reflects the educational role that the mother played in the traditional Jewish family. In a world where the school as we understand it today did not yet exist, where men worked outside the home, while women took care of the large amount of domestic work, which included caring for their children, both boys and girls, until they were old enough to help with the work, the task of introducing their children to the knowledge of the faith and culture of the people belonged primarily to the woman.



As the great biblical figures of Esther and Judith show, moreover, the generative capacity of women does not at all end in giving birth to children: rather, it is fulfilled in the courage to risk one's own life so that the people may have life, so that the people may know the path to follow and find the strength to set out, according to the will and love of their God.

The woman, in short, is generative not only when she gives birth, but every time she educates, because a wise education opens the young to the way to Life. In her educational task, moreover, woman disposes of a competence that man is precluded from: woman, in fact, lives in her body the cycle of life and death that characterises created nature and which is, in itself, like a prophecy of resurrection (cf. Jn 12:24). Being attuned to the rhythm of life, she helps the woman to listen to the voice of God who speaks in every element of Creation and then, as biblical Wisdom does, to teach all those who, in the journey of life, rely on her accompaniment and intercession to do the same.

If we look closely at God's history with his people, moreover, we realise that Mary is not the only woman in Israel who stands out for her wisdom! On the contrary: Mary is part of a long genealogy of wise women: some precede her, such as Esther, Judith, Ruth, Deborah, Elizabeth; others follow her and are the many wise saints that dot the history of the Church. As Salesian Family, we can recognise among them, with particular gratitude, Mamma Margaret and Mother Mazzarello.

The link between Mary and Wisdom, in fact, is particularly important in the Salesian charism: in the dream at 9, Mary is presented to Don Bosco as the Teacher of Wisdom, and the Saint's biography confirms a special link between the educational style of Margaret and Mary, both teachers of the preventive system, that is, of that art of educating the young with love, according to reason and in openness to God's plan.

When Don Bosco met Mary Domenica and her first companions at Mornese, he soon realised that among them Mary had already built her home: these young women, in fact, full of God and Mary, rooted in a daily life of work and prayer, they already spontaneously lived the key elements of the preventive system. To the first FMA leaving for the missions, Pope Pius IX solemnly recalled this trait of their identity and mission as educators: to be for all the thirsty basins of virtue and wisdom, like the great fountains that we can still admire today in the square in front of St Peter's.

To Mary, who now understands the meaning of all things, to Mamma Margherita, to Mother Mazzarello and to so many saints and holy men and women who in their earthly lives have walked the path of wisdom and now share with the Mother the joy of Heaven, let us ask together the grace to learn to recognise the traces of God's presence and love in every element of Creation, to grow in respect and care for all that is living and entrusted to our hands.