The Marist Way of Praying the Salve Regina – Part I

I want to end my series of reflections on the Marist Way of educating youth by devoting some thoughts to Mary. Specifically, I want to reflect on the hymn, *Salve Regina* (Hail, Holy Queen), which our students have made their own. I say that because when they sing it at Mass, they "get into it," especially when they belt out "O Clemens, o pia, o dulcis Virgo Maria." They sing those words with a gusto that only teenagers can pull off and that Mary, who raised a teenager herself, would get and smile in appreciation.

Since I am reflecting on the *Salve Regina*, let us take a deeper dive into the Queenship of Mary. Admittedly, that is a stumbling block for many because royalty is not within their experience. In addition, it is contrary to their experience living in a democracy. Stay with me and see if what follows will bring her closer to us than we might first believe possible. I want to acknowledge my indebtedness to Scott Hahn, who treats this in great detail in his book, "Hail, Holy Queen".

He points out that most nations in the ancient Near East were monarchies ruled by a king. At that time, kings practiced polygamy, which raised two questions: who should be the queen and, more importantly, whose son should be given the right of succession? You might be surprised to learn that the woman ordinarily honored as queen would have been the woman who was the mother of the king.

That was the practice of the nations when Israel clamored for a king. God was to be Israel's king, but the people begged the prophet Samuel to have a king like the other nations. God did accede to their request, but the decision to have an earthly king would foreshadow the future kingship of God's son that would last forever.

You will recall that King David's son, Solomon, succeeded David as king. Scripture tells us that Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, sat at his right hand. "So, Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him on behalf of Adonijah. And the king rose to meet her and bowed down to her; then he sat on his throne, and had a seat brought for the king's mother, and she sat on his right." (1 Kgs 2:19)

The queen mother's role described above reflected the practice at that time. Hahn points out that the queen mother was not a figurehead but held an office and exercised real authority. He notes that Queen Bathsheba approached her son to speak on behalf of another person. That was one of the duties of the queen mother. She acted as an advocate or intercessor for the people.

He also notes that King Solomon rose from his throne when his queen mother entered the room. On all other occasions, the king's subjects would rise and bow before the king. King Solomon rose when Queen Bathsheba entered and even bowed to her. Then she sat at the place of honor, at his right side.

Note, too, that King Solomon's authority and power were not threatened. He remained the king and would honor her requests not because he was legally required to do so but out of filial love. When Adonijah approached Bathsheba, he said, "Pray, ask King Solomon. He will not refuse you." Clearly, King Solomon had a history of granting his mother's requests.

Hahn notes kings also relied on the queen mother as their chief counselor. Thus, the queen mother served the king as a political adviser, strategist, and advocate for the people while remaining a loyal subject to the king.

There are other parallels that Hahn points out. The earthly King David ruled over a holy city, Jerusalem. His ultimate successor, Jesus, would rule over a heavenly kingdom. David's first successor, King

Solomon, reigned beside the queen mother. David's ultimate successor, Jesus, will reign as king with his queen mother, Mary, at his side.

With this in mind, Hahn visits the scene at the wedding feast of Cana. Mary approaches her son and intercedes on behalf of the people, in this case, a newlywed couple. Mary counsels her son but tells the servants to obey Jesus' instructions, not hers, when she says, "Do whatever he tells you." (John 2:5) Those words are also meant for his present and future disciples. Jesus replies to his mother as her superior but defers to her request.

Jesus remains her superior by virtue of her being a disciple of his. "A disciple is not greater than his teacher." (Mt. 10:24) The Church teaches us that Mary is the first disciple of her son because she was the first to hear the Word of God (the Annunciation) and to keep (obey) it. Later in his life, Jesus would say, "Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it." (Luke 11:28) Jesus could just as easily have said, "Blessed (favored by God) are those who hear the Word of God and continually obey or do what God asks."

The word, continually, implies being persistent, reliable, dependable, and faithful. Having said yes at the Annunciation should not be seen in isolation from her having to say yes to the Word of God continually. The prophecy of Simeon (Luke 2:34-35), the flight into Egypt (Matthew 2:13-21), the loss of Jesus for Three Days (Luke 2:41-50), the carrying of the Cross (John 19:17), the crucifixion of Jesus (John 19:18-30), and when Jesus is taken down from the Cross (John 19:39-40), are all examples of Mary's yes at the Annunciation reverberating throughout her life.

Jesus would say, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it." (Luke 8:21) The family of Jesus is not constituted by a physical relationship with him but by obedience to the Word of God. Yes, Mary was the biological mother of Jesus, and yes, Mary sits at his right hand as his queen mother. However, all of that would be for naught if she were not first his disciple who continually heard the Word of God and kept it while on earth and now in heaven. From there, she continues to do whatever he tells her. The Society of Mary expresses Mary's obedience to her son. He willed that his mother would intervene through a religious order that bears her name and is intended to channel her presence so that she can be present to the Church now during these troubled times as she was when the Church began.

The power of her role as advocate and intercessor is seen in an incident in the life of St. Marcellin Champagnat, a Marist Father who founded the Marist Teaching Brothers. The Brothers refer to it as the Memorare in the Snow.[1] Below is an abbreviated account of what happened.

> You know the lantern is an important symbol for our Marist Family. Though the exact day is lost to us, we know that 200 years ago, in February of 1823, Fr. Champagnat and Brother Stanislaus were on their way home to l'Hermitage and got caught in a ferocious snowstorm. The pair were in a deadly situation: cold, lost, and unable to continue. Their survival was in jeopardy, and hope must have been fading quickly. Fr. Champagnat and Brother Stanislaus prayed the Memorare. It was not the act of a desperate man but of a faithful one, confident in Mary's protection in the time of his need.
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> A short while later, he spied in the distance the light of the lantern. That night a local farmer named Mr. Donnet had gone to check on his animals. For some reason, in the

[1] For a more complete version of this miracle, go to https://champagnat.org/en/memorare-in-the-snow/.

> middle of this blizzard, he lit his lantern and took the outside way around when there was a convenient door inside that connected the barn and the house. Fr. Champagnat and, independently, the Donnet family believed this story was miraculous.

Some would look at this and conclude it was just a coincidence. However, we look at it with the eyes of faith and see beyond what appears to be a coincidence to what it truly is: Mary acting as the queen mother. In this capacity, she interceded with her son, Christ our King, on behalf of these two men who turned to her in their hour of need.

She invites us to do likewise in our hour of need. We have all but to say,

> Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,
> our life, our sweetness and our hope.
> To thee do we cry,
> poor banished children of Eve.
> To thee do we send up our sighs,
> mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.
> Turn then, most gracious advocate,
> thine eyes of mercy toward us,
> and after this, our exile
> show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
> O clement, O loving,
> O sweet Virgin Mary.

Or we can also hold a rosary or a picture of Mary, who is our life, our sweetness, and our hope, and imagine in that gesture her placing our hand in hers. That includes taking our sighs, mourning, and weeping and presenting them to Christ, our Lord, and King. Her primary role as the Queen of Heaven is to be our advocate and intercessor. And, yes, there is a history of granting his mother's requests.

Mary, Seat of Wisdom, pray for us.