

A Reflection on the Blessed Mother: “Do whatever he tells you”

I always remember the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel because my brother Ricky married his wife, Christina, 12 years ago that day. They had a gorgeous wedding. But John and I often laugh remembering that day.

You see, their wedding was supposed to be a breeze for us. Neither one of us was in the wedding, and we thought it would be so much fun just to go as guests.



But what I didn't realize was that because we weren't in the wedding, everyone else thought we had it easy, too. So soon enough we received some assignments. We would get to the church early, so John could put traffic cones in the street to reserve spaces for the cars. I would make sure the flowers were in place from the florist. How hard could that

be?

Then that morning we got to the church and I couldn't find the rose the bride was supposed to leave by the Mary statue when she dedicated her bouquet to the Blessed Mother. You can't skip that on a Marian feast! I panicked and called my mother who stopped on her way to the wedding to buy a rose. At the reception, I knew we would be able to relax, right?

But just as we were sitting down to eat, my mother came over to our table. My brother had forgotten his going-away outfit back at the hotel—45 minutes away. He simply could not leave the reception to head off for their honeymoon in his tuxedo. So John and I bolted our food, jumped in the car, and drove back to the hotel, found the outfit, jumped back into the car, and raced back to the reception. We walked into the room, and the first person I saw was one of my aunts. She was wiping tears from her eyes and said, “That was so beautiful.”

“What happened?” I said.

“Christina just gave the most beautiful tribute to her father. It was so moving.”

So we had missed this incredibly emotional moment, but at least we made it in time for dessert. As we were helping ourselves to ice cream sundaes, my mother reminded me we had promised to give two of my cousins rides back to the hotel.

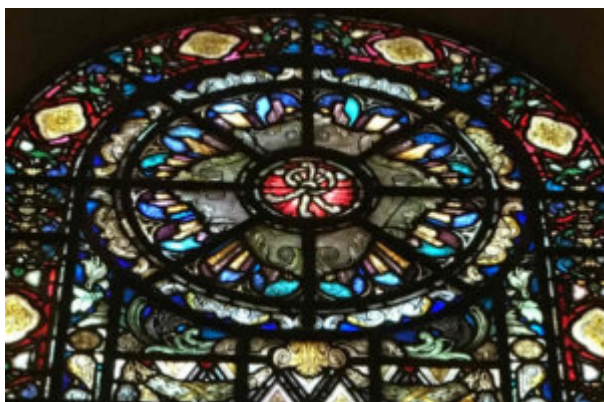
Would we also mind giving my brother’s friend Albert a ride to the train station? Of course not. That seemed easy enough.

But minutes later Albert was at my elbow, telling me he had to be at the train station in a half hour for a train. So we grabbed the rest of our carpool and everyone’s luggage, and sped off to the train station.

Whenever I think of that day, I remember how wrong I was to think we would just show up and enjoy ourselves. We did have fun, but it wasn’t the day we thought we’d have. It reminds me of the wedding feast at Cana, and how Jesus probably thought he would be able to relax and have a good time. Then Mary approached Jesus and said, “They have no wine.” And even though his response makes it sound as if He doesn’t plan to help, she tells the servants: “Do whatever he tells you.”

They do, and through Scripture, we experience Jesus’ first miracle.

I love the wedding feast at Cana, partly because it makes me feel better about the times in life when I don’t jump to my feet to help, or when I grumble a little (or more than a little).



But the main reason I love that story is because we see Mary's quiet strength, her ability to carry requests to Jesus with success, and her interceding for such a simple issue: a lack of wine at a wedding. If Mary can ask Jesus to address something that mundane, then she can certainly intercede for us in any matter, large and small, weighing on our minds and hearts.

And I love, love, love that she says, "Do whatever he tells you." It sounds so simple. And in the case of filling wine jugs with water, it might be. But what if those five words were directed at each of us? First of all, what a challenge—to discern what God is calling us each to do. And second, how can we possibly accomplish it? Because being followers of Christ is not easy.

As my friend who is a third-order Carmelite said to me, "We get impossible jobs in order to kick sin out of the world."

Mary had impossible jobs, too. Yes, she was conceived and born without sin. But she was also human. She was a real person. And she became the Mother of God. And sometimes I think, that's not me. She had God with her every single step of the way. But don't we all? Isn't God with each of us for every single step?

He gives us the grace and the strength we need, even in the darkest, most confusing times. And he also gave us Mary—someone who can stand at her Son's elbow and turn to us and say, "Do whatever he tells you."

And Mary gets us. She hears us. She loves us. She's a mother. And she knows what our Lord asks of us. She knows it's daunting. But she also knows we each have what we need to achieve the work God sets out for us on earth.

When we are faced with pain or challenge or even a task that just stretches us in new ways, sometimes it's hard to relate to Jesus or God the Father. We try to be like Jesus, but he was God made Man. But Mary! She's one of us.

She did all the human tasks we do and dealt with such tremendous difficulties...an unplanned pregnancy as a teenager, traveling on a donkey while pregnant, giving birth in a stable, fleeing into Egypt with her new baby and husband, but then back to Nazareth for an ordinary life where she raised the Son of God.



She stepped aside and quietly supported her Son as He begin his ministry. And then she stood at the foot of the cross and watched Him suffer and die. Even then she had to continue his ministry for him as one of the first disciples. Her work never ended. She couldn't just say, "Oh, I gave birth to the Son of God. Now I can stop." Or, "I raised the Son of God. Now I'm good." She continued to carry on, doing God's work, even after the resurrection. She continues to work with and for God's Church on earth today.

And so do we, each and every day. So on those mornings when we wake up and think, what now? I answered your call, God. I did what you asked me to do. And I did it well. But we never get to stop listening for that next step. We never get to say we have completed our work on this earth until, of course, God takes us home.

And so we end up on journeys we wouldn't have chosen for ourselves...or which we hardly feel prepared for. That's when we can turn to Jesus through Mary. She's the Mother of God. But she is also human. And because of who she is, because God gave her such extraordinary grace, she is able to be our spiritual mother. She suffered too. She was given more than any one person should be able to handle. She didn't just survive. She didn't just endure. She achieved heaven. She shows us how to rely on God and live and fulfill God's purpose. And she can teach us how to have a deeper relationship with Jesus in our daily lives.

She also loves each of us in a special way. She is our spiritual mother. How wonderful to know that not only can I turn to our Blessed Mother for comfort and inspiration and reassurance, but that I can also teach our children to turn to her—to pray as Mother Teresa did, "Mary, Mother of God, please be a mother to me now."

That simple prayer is like when my children yell, “MAMA!” Sometimes it’s because they’re hungry or stuck behind the couch or arguing over a toy. But sometimes they don’t know what they need. They just know they want me. Sometimes prayer is like that. And Mary is so perfect for helping us when we don’t even know what we need.

That’s why I love the Hail Mary. And it’s why I love the Rosary. Because when I can’t find the words to express my worries or others’ intentions properly, I can plunge into the Rosary, and it helps me turn it all over to Mary, like a child crying on his mother’s shoulder. To feel comforted and loved, we don’t need to have the right words—or any at all. We just need to ask for help.

Then as our prayers are answered, the answer may not be what we hoped for. And that’s when, at times, hearing our Blessed Mother saying, “Do whatever he tells you” might be most important. Because we absolutely shouldn’t need our mother to remind us to follow Christ with our whole heart, mind, and soul. But I also shouldn’t need my mother to call and remind me to offer to bring an appetizer to a party, or remember my nephew’s birthday, or come to dinner once in a while. So it’s no wonder our spiritual mother sometimes gives us a nudge or whisper to remind us to connect more deeply with her Son.

So let’s try to do whatever He tells us. And let’s try to grow closer to Jesus through our friendship with Mary, His mother and ours.

A longer version of this reflection was shared at a Baltimore Frissatti event at Saints Philip and James Church in Baltimore on July 15, 2017.