

In November of 2017 while coordinating a retreat for my Marist 'confreres' at the Friary, we received some very beautiful input on Mary. One paper was entitled **The Blessed Virgin - Vatican 11 asked: Is she truly our sister?** The article was written by **Biagio Mazza** and much of what is discussed here is taken from that paper. My mother's generation would have some difficulty in referring to Mary as our sister because she would relate more to the familiar title of "mother". Of course she is that too. It is her singular honour isn't it? - To be the Mother of Jesus, to be the Mother of God. I wonder how you react to hearing 'Mary as your sister'. Maybe you see her that way or maybe not. It is certainly an awareness that has grown in me over the years. She has become more accessible in a way.

Mary has a very special place in our Catholic consciousness and in many ways devotion to her was one of the identifying marks of being Catholic. Many bishops participating at the Second Vatican Council desired an increase in devotion to her, wanting to honour her with new titles that would show her unique role in God's plan of salvation. These bishops wanted a separate document on Mary.

Many other bishops wanted a different emphasis and approach on Mary because they felt some of the thinking about her would be offensive to other Christian denominations, not founded in scripture and divert devotion away from Christ. Other Christians have often levelled that accusation toward Catholics in the past. I have a sense that this attitude is changing among a number of mainstream denominations today. These other bishops wanted to highlight Mary not as different from the rest of us, but as an integral member of the People of God, a model member of the Church and a true example of discipleship. They wanted her role as a member of the Church and a premier example of the discipleship to which we are all called to shine out. These bishops wanted not a separate document on her but for her to be included in the document on the Church. It was these bishops that won the day.

Despite the tensions among the bishops, Mary is understood primarily as a member of the Church, one of us, a fellow pilgrim on our journey to God, who has walked our walk and models fidelity and discipleship at its best. Vatican II roots Mary in scripture, making ecumenically sensitive reflections on her role and function. Mary is not unique in her fidelity to God's will but models what all disciples are called to do: listen and respond to God's Word. Like Mary, we are called to hear God's Word, reflect on what it demands of us, allow it to take flesh in our lives, and share that life with the world.

Christ is the mediator between God and humanity. He is the one who is the full manifestation of God who gifts us completely with God's love and saving presence. Mary was totally in tune with God, agreed to cooperate with God's plan to bring Christ into the world. She had many challenges and spent her life in learning what discipleship meant. We all have that same vocation. Mary, is our sister in faith along with all those who have gone before us "marked with the sign of faith". That includes many of our own family members and people we have known and loved throughout our lives who have died. We can be confident that Mary and this great cloud of witnesses is cheering us on in our pilgrim journey, encouraging, supporting and caring for us as we struggle to learn what discipleship really means in the face of our own challenges. In doing so we cooperate as she did with God's saving plan for all humanity.

I hope you have a real sense of being sisters walking in faith together.

God bless you all.