

Hello everyone it is good to be back with you. I have been wondering what it means when it the Bible talks about being '*overshadowed*' by God?

The early Marists and particularly Fr Colin held the early church as the model for the Society of Mary. The work of the Holy Spirit is central to the early church where frightened apostles and disciples were transformed into dynamic, heroic and passionate witnesses of the Good News.

Pat Gohn, a writer I respect, writes "*As we look at the gift of the Holy Spirit, we cannot help but look at Mary. She was intimately acquainted with the Spirit of God long before all others in the New Testament.*" Mary's relationship with the Holy Spirit began in her own mother's womb. Mary was empowered to live in original blessedness and used her human free will untainted by original sin. One of the ways I try to make some sense of this is that Jesus saved Mary from sin by protecting her from it ahead of time, a bit like a vaccination; whereas Jesus sets us free from captivity to sin, a bit like open heart surgery. Simplistic image I know, but it helped me get a little understanding of a massive mystery of faith. In both cases, it is Jesus the healer and Saviour equipping us for our unique roles in the kingdom of God.

Mary was not acting out of slavish fear, shame or unfulfilled need when she said '*yes*'. Her response was pure love to love. Her '*fiat*' welcomed the Holy Spirit to *overshadow* her and Jesus was conceived in her womb. Scripture tells us no one can say "*Jesus is Lord*" unless they are under the influence of the Holy Spirit. (1Cor.12:3) Notice Scripture does not say under the command or the orders of the Holy Spirit, but under the '*influence*'. What a beautiful way to describe the Spirit's gentle leading and also our Marist way of being with the Holy Spirit and with others.

One image which helps me reflect on the inner life of the Trinity has been that Father, Son and Holy Spirit embrace each other in a perpetual dance of eternal love and they are so filled with joy that they long to draw others into that dance. Imagine each person of the Trinity constantly circling, embracing and yielding to the other in joy and intimacy. The astonishing truth is that the Holy Spirit longs to lead us into that same dance. We're invited to partner with the Trinity and learn to trust the Holy Spirit's prompting, influence, leading, guiding and yield in joy to the Spirit as Mary did.

She actively engaged in the dance of salvation which continually overflows from God's ever welcoming heart. Today it is we who are invited by God (and Mary) to be responsive, stay in step with the Holy Spirit, laugh at ourselves when we trip up or have fumbling feet and most importantly, simply be who we are called to be and dance our own unique way with God. No two people will ever dance with the Spirit exactly the same.

Think about how that feels as you read this next verse, which is a prayer for Mary to call upon the Holy Spirit for us:

Artist: Jenny Pixler - Song: '*Sacred Silence*' on the Album '*Live it*'

*Holy Mary, gentle mother,
God's pure vessel, praying for me.
Saints and angels, all in heaven,
Come and be with me.*

In the First Testament overshadowing was awe inspiring, at times terrifying, full transformative power not just for that one person, but for the whole people. The promises the angel made to Mary, are the New Testament version of the promises to Noah about the Flood, to Abraham concerning the birth of Isaac in the barren womb of Sarah, and to Moses that God would lead his people from slavery, overshadowed by the power of the Most High. Mary became the new Ark of the Covenant, and in her the Ark was no longer terrifying, but compassionately approachable, humbly bearing the mercy of God into the heart of the world.

Notice that the first Ark of the Covenant which was overshadowed by the cloud of God's glory held three things:

- The desert Manna: supernatural bread; foreshadowing Jesus, the bread of life.
- The staff of Aaron: symbol of the High Priest, foreshadowing Jesus, the one High Priest
- The tablets of the Law: given to Moses by God; foreshadowing Jesus True Word of God.

All those elements were present in Christ within the womb of Mary. In our own lives we receive Eucharist, the true bread of life; we are anointed in Baptism and Confirmation by the Holy Spirit and we are called to journey through life, overshadowed by the influence of the Holy Spirit. Vatican II calls all the Lay faithful priests, prophets and kings in our daily life and Jesus and the Living Word comes to us in Eucharist and Scripture, empowering us with His Spirit to live as disciples.

This month the invitation is to more intentionally join in the dance with the Holy Spirit, to be influenced and guided through our day with the same Spirit which guided Mary and who empowers us to say *"Jesus is Lord"*. In John 14 Jesus tells us *"Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."* God wants to be at home within us and to influence us to put his Good news into action in a myriad of ways. We are invited to dance with the Spirit and in joy draw others into that dance of Good News within an abundant, joy-filled life.

As disciples seeking to live the way of Mary, we are also living tabernacles of God. The Most High overshadows you or in Jesus' words, *"we come and make our home with you."* Wow – I know this is some deep stuff this month, but I am sure God wants us to *'get'* this in our own unique lives; God wants us to know who we really are and how God sees us. When we can let this truth sink deep into our lived experience, how can we help but be like Mary, live for God alone and make our own *'Yes'* of love to every day.

So, anyone for a dance? Please spend a few moments now before you break into discussion, responding personally to the Holy Spirit's invitation.

God bless.