

„A Year with Fr. Brisson“



Celebrating the centenary of the death of the Servant of God

THE REVEREND LOUIS BRISSON

(1817-1908)

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by

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Fr. Brisson loved to busy himself with astronomic clocks. If he succeeded in building one, it was for him like a miracle. "I do it," he said "to relax my mind; I could not fulfill all my tasks if I did not have something that would distract me from my worries."

The clock distracted him from his worries and united him to God: "It is recreation for me, it unites me to God, because I continuously tell the Savior that every minute of my life belongs to him and that I offer him as many movements of the heart as the balance-wheel is moving." Fr. Brisson's biography by Mother Aimée de Sales de Ciskey that speaks of Fr. Brisson's astronomic distractions, informs us about another project as well. Though that project is not astronomic it is nevertheless celestial.

On his feast day, June 21st 1896, he speaks to the Oblate sisters: "I have an idea to be realized soon: Each Congregation likes to call upon the Blessed Mother under a specific title: The Benedictines of Mesnil-Saint-Loup call upon 'Our Lady of Holy Hope'; the Dominicans pray to 'Our Lady of the Rosary'; the Ligorians address her as 'Our Lady of perpetual help' and I see that this custom exists in many communities. I would be glad if we would be calling upon the Blessed Virgin under a special name. How are we going to call our Lady? We are going to call her 'Our Lady of Light'. This name reminds me of my first prayer. I often said an *Ave Maria* as child in order to achieve my task. I prayed one Ave Maria in French, two in Latin and three in Greek; the Holy Virgin was therefore my light, and that is the reason why I want to call her that way." (tome II, p. 163-164)

Besides this rather personal reason, Fr. Brisson mentions another special reason for calling her 'Our Lady of Light': Satan calls himself Lucifer, which means carrier of light ... So! My children, the Blessed Virgin who has fought and overcome all heresies, will also fight and overcome this one. This is why we are going to call her 'Our Lady of Light'. (Memories of Mother Aimée de Sales de Cissey; stenographed manuscript; Troyes, Archive of the Oblate Sisters).

A rather nostalgic explanation is therefore being supplemented by a pastoral purpose: we ask for the intercession and help of the Mother of God to fight a satanic enemy, who girds himself with darkness to better be able to do the evil he desires to do. That is a laudable intention without doubt. But Mary's magnificence, manifest in a special way in the Gospel of Mark, doesn't consist in exceptional insights about how to overcome the ruse and disguise of Lucifer. Mary's grandeur rather lies in that faith that stands firm in the same darkness we humble faithful we all are very well know of.

During the annunciation, when Mary comes to know from the angel of her vocation as Mother of God, she is a virgin that barely understands God's call. The angel who knows everything and doesn't forget anything of what he knows, reveals to her that she will conceive as virgin. This insight suffices her, or at least she knows how it can suffice, because it comes from a God she desires to serve. Of course she cannot imagine what the godly motherhood will ask from her but that doesn't matter: those who trust in God never need to regret their trust.

When Mary gives birth to the child that had been announced to her, her mission first starts like the mission of any other mother in this world. She needs to educate her son, but first she needs to present him to the Lord who had offered him to her. She so carries him to the temple, the house of God. Joseph who shares her responsibility accompanies her silently. The prophet Simeon however cannot hold back and starts speaking. He reveals to the Mother of God her mission and tells her that his eyes recognize in her Son the salvation of God, the light of the people, the sign that will be contradicted. Luke is not afraid of emphasizing the astonishment of Mary when she hears from the prophet Simeon of the sword that will pierce her (Lk 2: 34-35).

There is astonishment as well when Jesus, who with twelve is already an Israelite with all rights, proclaims: "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Lk 2: 49) Luke highlights once more the lack of understanding of the mother and the father: "But they did not understand what he said to them." (Lk 2,50) This means that they didn't succeed in understanding how the child would dare to worry them so much while being in the House of the Father.

In the report about the wine that starts running out at the wedding of Cana it is not mentioned that the mother of Jesus doesn't understand her son's behavior when she whispers in his ear that they do not have wine anymore. He says: "What do you want from me, woman? My hour has not yet come." This is a way to address a person whose interference one desires to reject as inappropriate. Mary remains silent. However, we wouldn't have been surprised, if she would have thought to herself that the hour to save someone else from his embarrassment is always appropriate. But these words are not as much words from a son as they are words from God's messenger who also claims his independence.

The same is probably also true when Jesus replies to those who tell him that his mother and his brothers are standing outside and wish to see him that his mother and his brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it (Lk 8: 19-21). This unexpected answer allows probably Mary to understand that she had been called to 'deny' herself in view of

Jesus' vocation. In view of such a transcendent vocation she was expected complete self denial.

This self denial ends at the cross. On Calvary Mary's motherhood is being assumed. Jesus assigns her the disciple who is present and says: "Woman, behold, your son!" By doing so he calls her to a new motherhood whose object will be the church, the new people of God. (John 19: 25-27) At Jesus' death therefore the mother of Jesus becomes the mother of the church. It is possible that Luke wanted to give an indication to that mission of Mary by presenting her praying along with the apostles who are waiting for the Spirit (Acts 1: 14). In the light of these remarks the name 'Our Lady of Light' seems to obtain its full significance. She deserves this name because her example as believing and faithful virgin lights the way that will be the way of all baptized. This example teaches us that what reveals itself as object of our faith will bring upon us pain, disturbance, difficulty, surprise and incomprehension. Luke took the effort to draw attention to this effect in the life of the mother of Jesus. Assuming motherhood that surmounts all human intelligence, Mary reflects upon the message she has received (Lk 1: 29; 2: 33). She permanently refers to the events she has taken part in and meditates upon them in her heart. We, who are meditating in our hearts this faithful example, should feel encouraged to walk on our own way of faith despite the darkness we will inevitably encounter on it.

Among all difficulties one unbelievable extreme seems to be the most difficult. Mary encounters such a difficulty when the angel announces that her child once grown up will be called Son of the Most High, and rule over the house of Jacob forever (Lk 1: 32-33). It is not the incredibility of such a child that occupies her mind most, but rather that majestic motherhood that would replace her virginal purity. The angel rebuts her concern with the Holy Spirit (Lk 1: 33) and Mary accepts that answer despite the fact that the person called by this mysterious name is unknown to her. The authority of an angel, authority of the one who sent him, suffices her. This authority allows her to think about and formulate her answer: an answer of a boundless availability fitting for a servant of the Lord.

Mary's availability is an unparalleled example. At the beginning of the first page of the story of salvation of the new covenant this availability becomes object of the meaning of the title 'Our Lady of Light'. Isn't the light, burning at its full glance in Jesus' mother from the annunciation on, that availability for everything that her motherhood will bring along, from day to day, until the day at the cross? What a joy if the majestic steadfastness of an immeasurable availability compared to Mary's availability, would be mirrored in our behavior in life.

+ May God Be Blessed +