

## Mary: The Bible & the Mother of God – Class 7

### I. Joseph (Genesis 37-50) prefigures Jesus

- A. Sold for silver
- B. With two condemned men
- C. Thirty years old
- D. Exalted to the right hand
- E. Saves Israel and the Gentiles

### II. Rachel

- A. Mother of Joseph and Benjamin; Joseph is the eleventh son but the firstborn of Jacob's favored wife
- B. Rachel dies giving birth to Benjamin (Genesis 35:17-20); Jacob renames him; Rachel is buried in a tomb near Bethlehem
- C. "Rachel is weeping for her children" (Jeremiah 31:15)
- D. Rachel is seen as powerful intercessor

### III. Mary

- A. Massacre of the Infants reference to Rachel's suffering (Matthew 1:16-21); Rachel is a symbolic figure of the suffering of Mary
- B. John, the beloved disciple (John 19:25-27), recalls Rachel's son Benjamin, the beloved of the Lord (Deuteronomy 33:12)
- C. Rachel—Mary
  - 1. Joseph: firstborn son of Rachel—Jesus: firstborn son of Mary
  - 2. Benjamin: "son" of Rachel's "sorrow"—John: "son" of Mary's "sorrow"
  - 3. Twelve sons: Benjamin is "beloved"—Twelve Apostles: John is "beloved"

### IV. Mary, Mother of the Church

- A. New Marian feast (2018) on the Monday after Pentecost
- B. Rachel's name meant "ewe" or "female sheep"
- C. Mary is described as the fair ewe of whom was born the Lamb (Melito of Sardis)
- D. Motherhood of Mary includes her intercession for her children
- E. We are to welcome Jesus's mother into our home (CCC, 2679)



In his lecture, Dr. Pitre noted that the concept of Mary as the new Rachel is not, to his knowledge, readily apparent in the writings of the Church Fathers. His insight is, however, consistent with patristic teaching that certainly sees Jesus as prefigured in the Old Testament figure of Joseph.

The story of the patriarch Joseph is familiar to many, at least in part. Joseph's many-colored coat, the envy of his brothers, their vengeance, and his ultimate vindication and mercy form one of the most gripping stories in the Old Testament. It is a very important story in the history of Israel and comprises almost a quarter of the Book of Genesis (see Genesis 37, 39-50).

To understand Joseph (and his mother Rachel), one needs to know the story of Jacob, Joseph's father. After fleeing the wrath of his brother Esau, whom he tricked out of his inheritance, Jacob goes to seek a wife. Having

fallen in love with his uncle Laban's younger daughter Rachel, he agrees to work seven years for her. However, Jacob in turn is tricked by his father-in-law who substitutes the older sister, Leah, on the wedding night when Jacob is supposed to marry Rachel. Only after the marriage is consummated does Jacob discover the mistake. Jacob then works an additional seven years to gain his beloved Rachel.

Rachel and Leah enter into a competition over who can give Jacob the most children, and since Rachel is barren for a long time, the two women's maidservants are brought into the competition. After ten sons have been born to three mothers in this debacle, Rachel herself is finally blessed with two sons: Joseph, her firstborn, and then Benjamin, after who's birth Rachel dies.

Jacob shows favoritism to Rachel and her children, giving them protected places in dangerous situations (see Genesis 33:1-3). He treats Joseph like royalty with the gift of a special robe. Later in Genesis we hear of him speaking of Rachel as though he had only one wife, which would make Joseph the firstborn in his eyes (see Genesis 44:27), and he seems to use Joseph as a supervisor for his older brothers (see Genesis 37). Joseph's gift of dreams, which foreshadow his charism of ruling, does not ingratiate him with his brothers. When they get the chance, they enact a cruel vengeance upon Joseph, selling him as a slave, and then deceiving Jacob with a tale that Joseph has been killed by a lion.

But what his brothers meant for evil, God meant for good (see Genesis 50:20). Being the beloved son of his father, Joseph apparently draws from him a knowledge of God. When he is sent into slavery, his faith shines brighter as we see him resisting temptations and showing humility and compassion when he is later given an exalted position. Through his suffering and his mercy, Joseph becomes an instrument for the repentance and salvation of his brothers and their families.

Genesis recounts that Isaac's wife Rebekah sends their son Jacob to the home of her brother Laban to keep him safe from his angry brother Esau and so that Jacob might find a wife from among the family (see Genesis 24:29; 29:13). Rachel is thus Jacob's cousin, and the answer to his mother's prayers (in this time period, it was normal to marry relatives). Given how quickly Jacob falls in love and how cheerfully he works for seven years and then seven more, it seems evident that Rachel was an extremely good woman (see Genesis 29:16-18, 30). She continues to be his special treasure throughout their married life and holds a special place in his heart even after her death.

However, despite Jacob's great love for her, Rachel's life is tinged with sorrow. Through the trickery of her father, she has to share Jacob with her older sister. One cannot help but feel pity for both the women in this situation. God comforts the despised Leah with children, but Rachel is barren (see Genesis 29:31). Rachel has the love of Jacob but yearns for children.

Finally, after ten sons have been born to Leah, Leah's maidservant, and Rachel's maidservant, Rachel receives the blessing of a son, Joseph, whom she names as a prayer for more sons (see Genesis 30:22-24). Then, as the family is returning to Jacob's homeland, Rachel dies giving birth to her second son (see Genesis 35:16-19). While Rachel names this son Benoni, son of sorrow, his father renames him Benjamin, the son of the right hand.

Saint Augustine counsels that things in the Scriptures that cannot be interpreted literally as leading to goodness should be interpreted figuratively. While we may be hard pressed to justify some of Rachel's behavior (for example, giving her maidservant to her husband to bear children), it is still possible to consider her as a typological prefigurement of Mary. In some cases, we must look at the situation like a typological opposite as we have done in the case of Eve—while Eve is a disobedient mother of the living, Mary is the obedient mother of the living; while Rachel is anxious over children and tries to take matters into her own hands, Mary says, "How shall this be?" and waits upon the Lord's perfect plan, expecting a miracle.

Rachel's sorrows also provide a prefigurement of and an insight into Mary. As Rachel yearned to bear Jacob a son, so Mary desires eagerly to bring children to God. Rachel is presented in Scripture as one who has deep concern for her children even after her death. The prophet Jeremiah speaks of Rachel mourning over the exile of the Israelites "Thus says the LORD: 'A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not'" (Jeremiah 31:15). In that same chapter the prophet goes on to tell Rachel that her prayers are answered, for her "children shall come back to their own country" (Jeremiah 31:17). Both rabbinical tradition and Jewish devotional practice present Rachel as a powerful intercessor for Israel. Rachel's grave, mentioned in Genesis 35, is a place of pilgrimage to this day, including women who invoke Rachel's intercession against childlessness.

The evangelist Saint Matthew understands that the prophecy of Jeremiah regarding Rachel's weeping is fulfilled at the time of the Flight into Egypt and the Massacre of the Infants in Bethlehem. Read the account in Matthew 2:13-18 and imagine the scene. Note the many parallels: Jesus's flight into Egypt embodies both Joseph being sold as a slave in Egypt and the Israelites' exile from the Promised Land. Mary's tears on the occasion are likewise twofold: for her own child and for the children of her neighbors and friends. The context of the prophecy is important here for it is part of a prophecy of hope for the future despite the immediate sorrow. Even as Mary and Jesus leave amidst destruction, her prayers are being heard.

The power of a mother's prayers is of tremendous value. Just as Rachel's prayer for the Israelite exiles was heard, and they were eventually brought back to the Promised Land, so too Mary is a powerful intercessor, both in her role as queen mother, as we saw in an earlier session, and in her role as a new Rachel and Mother of the Church. Take a few moments to reflect on how Mary's connection with Rachel might deepen your appreciation for both of these women.