

Mary shows us the difference between being good and great:

2 words: “To Ponder”

Mary pondered these things in her heart:

- **At the birth of Jesus**
- **At the Angel Gabriel’s announcement that Mary is to be the mother of God**
- **At the words of Simon in the temple: “A sword will pierce your soul so that the thoughts of many may be laid bare.**

What does it mean “to ponder”?

- **Greek understanding: the unexamined life is not worth living. The Thinker: Think through implications**
- **Hebrew understanding: to hold, carry and transform tension and not give it back; resisting in a deep way. Example: Rosa Parks sitting on a bus.**
- **Mary at the cross: I cannot stop the crucifixion of my son; nobody can; but I can radiate the opposite: gentleness, understanding, forgiveness, peace light and courage.**

In the gospel story of the young man, we hear him ask Jesus, “How can I be perfect?”. (How can I be great?)

Jesus responds: Keep the commandments; Love God and love neighbor.

But, he responds, “I have done these things”. He was already good, and so are we on most days.

But he pushes the envelope, “How can I be great in the kingdom of God?”

Jesus responds, “Sell all you have give to the poor and follow me.”

We need to move beyond justice. We need to move beyond just keep the commandments.

We need to forgive and to love of enemies

Under the cross, Mary pondered the experience before her. She did much more than just keeping the commandments. She transformed hate-filled energy she was witnessing so as not to give it back in kind. She was sharing in her son’s transformation of hate by responding in mercy and forgiveness.

(Pause)

If we wish to move from goodness to greatness in the Kingdom we need to become like a sponge which absorbs tension inside our families, church, and community and transform the tension.

Last week I was over to a family's home for a post-Christmas celebration. One of the older uncles kept expressing his anger and hostility towards the Church. He had been in a parish that had been closed quite suddenly without much sensitivity to the people or the cultures. It was not the first time he had encountered prejudice and rejection in the Church. As he told his story, you could see how people in the circle were getting uncomfortable, especially since I was there.

The man had obviously been deeply hurt. He felt wrongly dealt with. He was amazed at the treatment he received from the leadership of the Church. But, unlike Mary at the foot of the cross, he had not pondered over these experiences and transformed them by forgiveness and love of his enemies. He had not yet moved from goodness to greatness in the Kingdom.

Ron Rolhieser in his book, Sacred Fire, gives an example of the water purifier. Just as impure water enters a water purifier and exits

cleansed, so too, for the great among us do the negative experiences enter their lives and are purified as they ponder on them bringing mercy and forgiveness to the memories.

As we celebrate the Feast of Mary, the Mother of God, we realize Mary's greatness in our midst. She witnessed to the transforming power of her Son. She pondered the great events of his life beginning with his conception and birth. She participated with Christ in transforming the world through forgiveness and love of our enemies.

If we wish to be not just good, but great in the kingdom, let us also ponder our experiences and join with Mary and her son, Jesus, the Christ, in transforming the world.