

Scripture Reflection: June: The Ascension and Pentecost



Salus Populi Romani in the Basilica of St Mary Major

“The Mother of God is an instrument of the Holy Spirit in his work of sanctification. Mary is the one who said “yes” to God and, with her example and by her intercession, pushes us to say “yes” to him too” *Pope Francis*

“Without Pentecost the Christ-event - the life, death and resurrection of Jesus - remains imprisoned in history as something to remember, think about and reflect on. The Spirit of Jesus comes to dwell within us, so that we can become living Christs here and now.”

Henri Nouwen

The Great feasts of the Ascension and Pentecost dominate the month of June in the Church. The Bible texts of the Ascension of Jesus do not put Our Lady at the scene, but paintings in the Early Church often put Mary at the event with the disciples. Scripture and pictures of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples certainly place Mary at the scene. She was a central figure in the early church community. When persecution of the followers of Jesus in Judea was so dangerous, the disciple John, took Mary with him to safety in Ephesus, Turkey. There is a house there where she is supposed to have lived. It is here that the first church dedicated to her was built.

Lately it has been very striking to see the devotion that Pope Francis and now Pope Leo have to Our Lady. The picture of Our Lady in the Church of St. Mary Major, which Pope Francis visited before and after his visits around the world, has a very special legend attached to it. When Mary travelled to Ephesus with St John she reportedly took with her a table which Jesus had made in his workshop. The top of the table made of cedar wood was painted with her image by St Luke when he visited there. If this is true, the picture is indeed special: wood which Jesus himself handled, his mother treasured and journeyed with it and St Luke painting it whilst Mary recounted the stories he wrote in his gospel. Incredible! Mary was given to the Church by Jesus himself whilst dying on the cross and she remains a central guiding force for us in the Church today.

Bethlehem was God with us, Calvary was God for us and Pentecost is God in us” Robert Baer