

*And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.*

Now some of you might say, Bishop, we know that’s not the Gospel we meditated on this morning. Or maybe you’re saying, I know that’s not the Gospel listed in the Liturgy aid.

But the church permits us to choose a Gospel passage about Mary whenever we celebrate her. And so, this Bishop made bold to choose this passage from Luke 2:19 for our Mass today.

Some of you may ask, Bishop, what is this, Christmas in July? Maybe we could think of making the Incarnation more present. But today with you, I would like to reflect on this phrase from Luke’s Gospel: *And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.*

Courage. Encourage. The very word makes us wonder, especially if you’re someone who loves entomology as I do, what the root of this word might be. We know from the old French, *courage* and from the Latin, *core*, that the fundamental basis of the word "courage" is "heart."

There are some priests present today who I have known for some time: Fathers Scalia, Check and Bochansky. These Fathers are well aware that in Italian, the word "courage" is *coraggio*. And if you’ve ever lived in Italy, as I had the grace to do, you know that you hear that word all the time.

For example, if a little child is taking an exam, the parents will say, *coraggio!* Of course, we would say, "Study hard!" If someone is demonstrating great athletic prowess in a sport, Italians will say, *coraggio*. We might say, "Keep going."

When people are sad, lonely or depressed, Italians will say, *coraggio*. Some might say, "Get over it." When people are confused or distraught, maybe they need help or guidance or direction, Italians will say, *coraggio*. Some might say, "Oh, please."

The very word *coraggio* of course means courage. But it means a lot more than that in a specific context. When an Italian says, *coraggio*, we might say "Take heart."

So today, I say to you, *coraggio*. Take heart. And what is this heart that we take? Whether it is on some sports field or studying for an exam; whether it's a time when we’re depressed, lonely or distressed; or a time when we need encouragement, we need to hear the word *coraggio*. Take heart.

As we celebrate this Mass in honor of Our Lady, we honor her as a woman of courage. As Luke tells us in this Gospel, once the shepherds arrive, Mary contemplates the mystery of what is happening; she kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.

We know, don’t we, that throughout her life this was the case. We’re told in Scripture that at the time of the presentation of the child Jesus in the temple, Simeon turns to Mary and says, *a sword will pierce your heart*.

We’re told, and we know from Scripture, that as Jesus is preaching and Mary, the apostles and disciples are outside, they hear Jesus say, *who are my mother and brothers and sisters? Whoever hears the word of God and keeps it*. Imagine her heart.

And when Jesus left to walk the way of the Cross and Mary met Him on the *Via Dolorosa*, imagine her heart. And as she watched him die for us, imagine her heart. And as she heard the first news of his rising, imagine her heart. A woman of profound courage. Probably the most accurate and beautiful depictions of the Immaculate Heart of Mary are those images in which the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary are almost blended: They can't be separated.

We know that the mysteries over which Mary pondered and reflected and meditated are the very mysteries that each one of us is called to reflect upon, to ponder and to consider every day.

Earlier this morning, I had the grace of being in the presence of a family who have a newborn baby, ten days old. They asked me to bless the baby, who was not yet baptized. The mother was cradling this little, tiny infant, and I asked, *is the baby sleeping for you?* The mother smiled. She said, *well Bishop, it's really very beautiful, because when I place him against my heart, he almost goes into a fetal position and instantly goes to sleep.* Because the baby, so close to his mother's heart in the womb, knew the protection of his mother, now, against her heart outside the womb, he still feels the cradling security of his mother.

And so we are called, in this Mass and of course in every Mass, to bring our hearts to Jesus by way of the powerful intercession of the woman of courage, the Immaculate Heart, Mary.

If you look up the definition of "courage" in Merriam's dictionary, here's what you find: "Mental or moral strength. To venture, persevere and withstand any danger, fear or difficulty."

"Courage," our friend Mark Twain says, "is not the absence of fear, it is acting in spite of it."

*Coraggio*: the word we hear today and what I hope each one of you hears today, even if you don't know Italian. I hope you hear Jesus and His mother, Mary, saying to you, *take heart*. No matter the struggle. No matter the pain. No matter the challenge. No matter the difficulty. No matter: *take heart*. And in receiving Christ's body and blood, know again that He is giving you the strength and the grace to take heart.

In whatever endeavors we find ourselves, I'm sure that you, like myself, would rather hear "Take Heart" than things like "Keep on going" or "Get over it." What we want to hear is a deeply spiritual *coraggio*—from the Christ, who knows every suffering that we know. From Mary, who knows every pain and anguish a mother could know. From them we hear these words, simple, direct, and encouraging: *Take heart*.

Now on a practical level, as we celebrate Our Lady, it's important to say that the most powerful thing we can do is to reflect, as Mary did, on the mysteries of Christ, especially in the Rosary.

In the seminary at the North American College where I met Father Scalia and Father Check, on the hallway where I lived, there was a shadow box on the wall outside of one of the seminarians' rooms. In the shadow box, hanging on small pins, was a little Rosary. And there was a sign on the outside of the shadow box that said, "In case of emergency, break glass."

As far as I’m concerned, every day is an emergency. *Coraggio*. The courage that we desire, that we need, that we long for, is found right here at the altar. And if we need to hear any other encouraging words, I would invite you to listen to just a few of these phrases from someone who is now known by many as the Courageous Pope, recently sainted; a man, who in his first words to us as Pope, said, *be not afraid*. Listen to some of these encouraging words of John Paul II.

“Do not be afraid. Do not be satisfied with mediocrity. Put out into the deep and lower your nets for the catch.”

“I plead with you, never, ever give up on hope. Never doubt. Never tire. Never become discouraged. Be not afraid.”

“The ethos of redemption is realized in self-mastery. By means of temperance, that is continence of desires.”

Ask yourselves about the love of Christ. Acknowledge His voice, resounding in the temple of your heart. Return His bright and penetrating glance, which opens the path of your life, to the horizon of the church’s mission. It is a taxing mission, today more than ever, to teach men and women the truth about themselves, about their end, about their destiny, and to show faithful souls the unspeakable riches of the love of Christ.

Do not be afraid of the radicalness of His demands. Because Jesus, who loved us first, is prepared to give Himself to you, as well as asking that you give yourself to Him. If He asks much of you, it is because He knows you can give much.

*Coraggio*. A lot packed into a simple Italian word. And a lot packed into that word here today for us. Whether we think of it as we leave Mass today in the Italian or maybe in a weak English translation, take heart. Our prayer for you—strengthened by the Eucharist once again, strengthened by the grace which comes from this conference, and strengthened by the power of the Lord and the intercession of the woman of courage—is that you, yourselves, each one, might take heart.

*Coraggio*. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.