



**The Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of
Saint John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and Malta**
USA Associations

2020 Champion Virtual Pilgrimage

**Reflection of Very Reverend John G. Girotti, ChD, Associate Moderator of the Curia, Diocese
of Green Bay (transcribed from audio)**

Mother of Mercy Hall, National Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help, Champion Wisconsin
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Hi everyone. My name is Fr. John Girotti and I'm a priest of the Diocese of Green Bay. I also happen to be the President of the National Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help here in Champion, Wisconsin. And I'm so honored to be with you, virtually, today to speak a little bit about our Blessed Mother. My role here is very much behind the scenes and administrative. I'm blessed to have Father John Broussard and Don Warden do all the day-to-day operations and pastoral work of this Holy Place. I'm sorry to not be able to be with all of you this year. We miss you terribly. But what crazy times we live in. Yet in a small way, virtually we can be together, and pray together and to speak about what we have in common, which is our faith in Jesus Christ and our love and relationship with His mother.

I'd like to speak a little bit today, about the words of Mary. The words of our Blessed Mother, like some of you, I lost my own Mom. She passed away about nine years ago or so. And I miss her very, very much. Hardly a day goes by that I don't think about her or look at her picture, which is in my office. But I found that over the years, that every so often, some of the words of my own mother, come to mind. It's almost as if she speaks to me and I have a hunch that those of you who've lost your own mothers or beloved family or friends, have had the same experience.

I remember one time, a number of years ago, I was walking in between two of my parishes, which are in downtown Green Bay. It was January, it was cold, and I wasn't wearing a hat. I was walking the four blocks between the two parishes and it was very cold. My ears were stinging, but I didn't want to wear a hat because it would mess up what's left of the little hair that I have. And I remember I heard in my mind, my mother saying to me, "you fool, wear your hat". So, I took my hat out of my pocket and put it on.

But that's how moms are. They speak to us. Even from, we trust, eternal life. And so that's been my experience with my own mother, but the good news is that Mary, our Blessed Mother, all of

our spiritual mother, she speaks to us too. Certainly, from the apparition sites, of which this is one, but also from the Scriptures. Did you know that Mary speaks to us, or is recorded as having spoken, only six times in the Gospels? Four times in Luke and twice in John. Certainly, she said a great deal more, but the Scriptures only record her these six times.

But what six things does she say? Powerful things. Phrases that we can meditate on. Phrases that you and I have heard many, many times before at Mass. What are these six? The first, "how can this be? Since I do not know, man". The second, "I am the handmaid of the Lord, may it be done to me according to your word." The third, "my soul proclaims, the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God, my savior." The fourth, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father, and I have been searching for you in great sorrow." The fifth, "they have no more wine." The sixth, "do whatever He tells you." Those are the six things that the scriptures record for the words of our Blessed Mother. And what I'd like to do just very briefly during this talk is to kind of guide us through these six phrases because there's a world of spiritual riches in the words and the phrases of our Blessed Mother.

So, before we get any further into this, let's say a little prayer and ask our Blessed Mother to pray for us. The name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord Jesus. You're so good to us. You've blessed us with so many things, but especially You have blessed us with Your mother. Since we share everything with You, Your mother is our mother too, spiritually. Help us to listen to what she says, because she always points to you. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen. Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The first thing Mary says in the Gospel of Luke is "how can this be since I do not know man." The Angel Gabriel had come. Mary was minding her own business. And like the marvelous painting of the Annunciation by Henry Ossawa Tanner. The angel appears and she simply looks. The angel says, "are you willing to be the mother of God". Mary with great faith says, "how can this be since I do not know man." But she asks this in faith. Notice that with the case of Saint Joseph and our Blessed Mother, they were married. But the Jewish practice of the time was that there were different stages of marriage. There was the betrothal. There was the ceremony. And then there was the moment when the couple moved in together. Mary and Joseph were married, but they were not living together at this time.

So she said, "how could this be since I do not know man." Some even say that she certainly, and along with Joseph, had made a promise of virginity. And so when the angel asks this question and says, "will you be the mother of God? And you'll have a son you'll name him, Jesus", she's very confused. "How can this be? Since I do not know, man." You know, friends, I think in our own lives, so often things happen to us and we say to the Lord, "how can this be?" The child who we've raised moves away, or friends take a job in another city, or a loved one is diagnosed

with cancer, or a project or plan or hope or dream that we had, doesn't come true the way we had hoped. Many times, you and I are confused with what is presented to us in life. Why are we doing a pandemic? Why are things so topsy-turvy today? Why are we living in so much fear? "Lord, how can this be?" And yet to ask that, with faith, as our Blessed Mother did, "how could this be?" God's Providence is at work.

And this is what leads us to the second phrase of the Blessed Mother. At the end of this interlude of the Annunciation between Mary and the angel, in the end, she says, "I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me, according to your Word" and that with that, the angel departs from her. And from that moment, she becomes the mother of God. "I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Mary accepts God's Providence in her life. What is Providence? It's God's loving plan. God has a loving plan for you and for me.

And I think one of the, few, blessings of growing old is that we can see sometimes how all the pieces fit in our lives. The experiences we had when we were very young. Joys and sorrows. Experiences of our first job. Experiences, perhaps early on in our marriage or early on in our priesthood. The mistakes that you and I have made. The regrets that we have and the great successes. One of the blessings of life as we grow older is that we see somehow that these pieces, they begin to fit. We don't see completely, but we come around the corner and we say, "Oh, that's why that happened when I was 20" or "why I had that experience when I was 25." God's loving Providence is God's loving plan for our lives.

And he's constantly at work in your life and in mine. As he was working in the Blessed Mother's life. She accepted that. She embraced that. "I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Yes, I will be the mother of God. Yes, I will do God's will. I don't understand it completely. It's rather mysterious, but okay. What a marvelous example of faith for us. We, who like Mary, wonder and question, and yet in the end that Fiat. Yes, I will do your will. "I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word". I accept your loving Providence in my life, O God. And my friends, you know, someday, I think one of the sweetest joys of heaven, will be seeing in a moment, in a flash, how all those experiences of our lives. Joys and sorrows. How they all fit together. That will be marvelous. And it fits together when we say "yes" to God, as Mary did.

Third phrase of our Blessed Mother is the great Magnificat. Recall that Mary goes to see her kinswoman, Elizabeth, who herself is pregnant with John the Baptist. She goes to the hill country and at this great moment, of which we call the Visitation, the infant leaps in Elizabeth's womb, and Mary responds, "my soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God, my savior." Et cetera. Notice the joy in our Blessed Mother. She is with child. She's with

her kinswoman, who is also pregnant. They are rejoicing in God's great gift and mercy in their lives. Is Providence. And she just gives praise and thanks to God. Do we do the same?

I don't know about you, but usually when I pray, I'm asking the Lord for something. He wants us to ask. "Ask, you shall receive. Seek, and you shall find. Knock and the door will be opened." We're supposed to ask, and we do ask. Good, very good. But do we ever in our prayer, just give praise to God. Thank you for this beautiful day. Thank you for allowing me to have a virtual pilgrimage. Thank you for calling me to the Order of Malta. Thank you for my family. My spouse. For my freedom. Living in this country. Food on the table. Roof, over my head. Love of Jesus Christ in my soul. The promise and hope of eternal life. And the list can go on. Do we ever thank God and praise Him for what He's done for us?

I think it's important. Certainly, because he's God and we're not. And, we owe it to Him to praise Him and thank Him. But also, it's a blessing for us, because, if pride is the original original sin. The common denominator of every sin that you and I commit is pride, isn't it? Always, and everywhere. The opposite of pride would be humility. How do we grow in humility? I think by being thankful. By praising God, because we are reminded in our humility and acts of Thanksgiving and praise that God is God and we are not. And that we have every reason to give thanks. That works against our pride. We grow in humility. We become saints. Mary shows us the way with her great Magnificat, but she also, sometimes, gets just a little bit upset with her Son. Not sinfully, of course, because she's immaculately conceived.

But the fourth thing Mary says is when Jesus is around 12. Remember that Mary and Joseph are on the way. They go to Jerusalem; they bring Jesus with them. Then they head home and inexplicably, they leave him behind. I don't know how that was possible, but they did. Can you imagine Mary turning to Joseph? And they look at each other and say, "we're in trouble. Now we lost God. We're going to get it." They went back and they found the boy, Jesus, around 12, teaching in the Temple. Then Mary says to her Son, her divine Son, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for You in sorrow." Very honest remark from a mother to her son.

How often have we done that, said "God, why have done this to me?" What have I done to deserve this? Why do I have so much sorrow in my life? Pain. Embarrassment. Why do I have to live through a pandemic? Why do I suffer with loneliness? Or an addiction? Which never goes away. Seemingly. "God, why have you done this to me?" "Son, why have you done this to us?" It's the same question. You and I ask it, "why God, why have you done this to us?"

It's a matter, I think, of embracing the crosses in our lives. You have a cross. I have a cross. We all have crosses. Jesus says, "take up your cross and follow me. If you don't do so, you're not worthy of me." What a challenge. And yet isn't it true that as we think about the crosses in our

lives, those little ones, and perhaps those big ones, that a cross in our life is the very thing that that brings us to our knees.

That reminds us that we're not that clever. That humbles us to recognize that we need a Savior. And that we have one and His name is Jesus. And He loves us, friends. Try to look at your crosses, not as burdens, but as a blessing. So often here in Malta, we help those who are suffering with ailments of all sorts of kinds. It's one of the great acts of mercy of the Order and a great responsibility we have. And a great privilege, but our own sufferings, our own crosses, take on meanings in the Cross of Christ. St. Paul says we make up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. So, there's a little room in the Cross of Christ for our crosses and our crosses fit. There. And on our shoulders.

My friends, you know, your cross is made just for you. It fits. I know mine fits me. It's hard. Wish it would go away. We ask God, "why have you done this to me?" And yet we know that the real reason that we are here today, and perhaps even being part of this virtual pilgrimage, is because somewhere along the line, there was a cross. There was a struggle. There was a suffering that made us see things differently and to become more serious about our faith. For every good Friday, there is an Easter Sunday. For every crucifixion, there's a resurrection. We have hope, but like Mary, we sometimes say, "God, why have you done this to me?" That's okay. As long as we keep talking to the Lord.

But sometimes there's more earthly problems. "They have no more wine." Fifth word of our Blessed Mother in John's gospel, the wedding feast of Cana. The couple is there. They're getting ready to get married. It's just one of the few things that has not changed in marriage ceremonies in 2000 years. Everything else has changed, but one is constant. If you run out of wine, that's bad. "They have no more wine."

And the couple, maybe, goes to our Blessed Mother, or maybe she sees, or maybe they have friends talk to her. They say, "go to Jesus, tell them to fix it". And Mary goes to our Lord. And then she says, "they have no more wine". Jesus says, "well, my hour has not yet come". But notice, first, how Mary deals with the problem. She sees with the eye of a loving mother. She sees. Do we see? You and I are busy people. We're active, even in retirement. We have lots of things to do. Families and children and grandchildren. Job. All sorts of things. But sometimes the challenge for me and perhaps for you is that we are so busy with our daily tasks that we don't see Jesus who is passing by.

We go to the ends of the earth, looking for him. We even go on virtual pilgrimages and actual pilgrimages. And we want to meet the Lord and we do, but do we recognize that he's right outside our door. Person of Lazarus. Right outside the door. We walk over him. We don't see

him. Do we have empathy? The Blessed Mother had empathy. She saw the problem. She did something about it.

She didn't say like you and I sometimes would say, "well, what a lousy wedding. They ran out of wine. What's the matter with them? They should have planned ahead. I can't believe this. Probably be lousy wine anyway. Why am I here?" This is how you and I act. Mary sees the problem. And what does she do? She doesn't complain. She doesn't gossip. She goes directly to the Lord with the problem. "They have no more wine." You and I ought to do the same. So many problems in our world. So many problems in our families. So many problems in the church. Lots of seemingly bad news today. You know it, I know it. We complain. We think we can fix it. We try to fix it. Usually make it worse.

Do we go to God first in prayer, fasting, sacrifice? Jesus, what do you want me to do about the problem in my family? What do You want me to do about the struggles in my business? What do you want me to do? And how can I help make your Church holier? How can I save my country? How can I help the poor? Do we go to God first? Or do you and I think we can fix it by ourselves? Do we even stop to ask the Lord what He wants us to do? I wonder sometimes the good that we do, which is good, but how much better it would be if we'd actually asked God, first of all, what He wanted us to do.

We think we know what He wants us to do. But do we know? Do we ask Him? I think of all the things that I've done in my former role as a parish priest. I was a pastor for 12 years. I loved it. We did all sorts of things. Good things. We weren't robbing banks. But I wonder if. If I had stopped and prayed a little more before I did all that activity. If I'd asked the good Lord what He wanted me to do. If I had gone to Him first and said, "they have no more wine", what His answer would have been. And my response would have been better.

But still when you notice the struggles and problems of life. We have empathy. We go to the Lord and then we listen to His response. And what does He respond to us? Well, He responds in kind with the sixth phrase of our Blessed Mother. The last thing she says in the scriptures, "do whatever he tells you." "Do whatever he tells you." Obedience. Are we obedient to what the Lord is telling us through His Church? Through just laws of our country. Through our well-formed consciences. Through our spouse. Through our parents. Or do we think we all have all the answers? Do we try to tell God what to do?

I'm amazed today with how everybody seems to be an expert. I think perhaps that the blessing of the internet has done this to us. Because we can look up the capital of a exotic country. We can know the average airspeed of unladen African swallow. We can look up all these things and we can find ourselves to be very, very clever. We have all the answers. No, we know how to

type things into a computer. That's all we know. Wisdom comes, I think, from experience and many times from pain.

"Do whatever he tells you." Don't look up the answer. Or do whatever feels good. Or do whatever's politically expedient. Or do what's good for now as long as it's okay, if you feel good about it, maybe. "Do whatever he tells you." That's what Mary says to the servants. Fill those water jars and "do whatever he tells you." The water turns into wine and the miracle is affected. And people come to faith.

My friends, you and I, need to be obedient. To just laws. Civil laws that are just. Teachings of the church. To our well-formed consciences. To those we love. Obedience means to hear. To listen. Hard to listen when there's lots of noise. "Do whatever he tells you". When we practice obedience to these things of this world, we are really practicing being obedient to God. "Do whatever he tells you." Do whatever Jesus tells you. Listen to Him. As the Father says at the Transfiguration, "This is my beloved son. Listen to him." Obedient. Obedere. Listen. Obedience means to listen. And Mary points to her Son.

These are just a few reflections on her words and the Gospels. Don't take my word for it. Open up the Gospels yourself. Read through these six phrases. See what God's Word says to you. The words of His mother. Hardly a day goes by that I don't think about my own Mom. And sometimes even in a mystical mysterious kind of way, usually humorous, she speaks to me. Sometimes my mom tells me to put on my hat. And sometimes she tells me to go to bed, because I have dark circles under my eyes. And sometimes she tells me to eat more vegetables. But all of which are true. What is the love of a mother? How much more our Blessed Mother prays for us. Speaks to us. And leads us to her son, Jesus, which is her entire job. Her entire role and her mission. Which is the mission of this Shrine to bring all of the people who visit us closer to our Lord, Jesus Christ. Our Lord Savior, God, and Divine Friend.

And now let's go not too far away from here. We've been talking about Mary. We've been talking about all sorts of wonderful experiences here at our Shrine. We've spoken about the Rosary and the experiences of following the Holy Family. Let's now go to Joseph. Let's go to Joseph. Not far from here, the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help in Champion, Wisconsin, we have the National Shrine of Saint Joseph, also here in the Diocese of Green Bay on the campus of St. Norbert College in De Pere, Wisconsin. Father Michael Brennan, the director of the Shrine of Saint Joseph, will give us an overview of that shrine and lead us in the beautiful litany of St. Joseph. It's been great being with all of you. God bless you.