

## **The Spirituality of St. Anne: Some Reflections on the Basis of Church's Tradition**

The apocryphal writings of St. James (145 AD) give us some insight into the life of St. Anne (*Hannah* in Hebrew). She was born in Bethlehem and was married to Joachim of Nazareth, both descendants of King David. Joachim was a rich and very devout man, who regularly gave to the poor. When Joachim made a double offering to the Temple in “expiation for his sins”, the Temple priest rejected his offering, because Anne was barren, as childlessness was interpreted as divine displeasure. Anne was very strong in her faith and God heard her prayers. An angel of the Lord appeared to her and promised that she would give birth to a child who would be known in the whole world. The angel also appeared to Joachim and told him that God had heard his prayers. At the age of three, the parents consecrated child Mary to God.

The Fathers of the Church testify that Mary became an orphan at the age of eleven, when she was still in the Temple. By the 10<sup>th</sup> century, there were three feasts in honour of St. Anne: November 25 (her special feast day); September 9 (the day after Mary's birthday); and December 9 (right after the celebration of the Immaculate Conception of Mary). In 1378 for the first time the feast of St. Anne was celebrated on July 26 in England, soon to be observed throughout the Western Church.

In the Middle Ages devotion to St. Anne was great. She was called the Comfortress of the Sorrowful, Mother of the Poor, Health of the Sick, Patroness of the Childless, Help of the Pregnant, Model of Married Women and Mothers, Protectress of Widows and Patroness of Labourers. All these titles were ascribed to St. Anne because of the kind of life she lived on earth.

**(1) Comfortress of the Sorrowful:** St. Anne underwent lots of trials and bitterness. She had to wait for very long to conceive and give birth to child Mary.

**(2) Mother of the Poor:** St. John Damascene the Church Father testifies that Sts. Anne and Joachim distributed one third of their possessions to the poor. Even today, the poor, and especially the dying poor, experience protection and consolation from St. Anne from heaven.

**(3) Health of the Sick:** The number of cures wrought through the intercession of St. Anne is countless. The blind have been restored of their sight, the deaf have received the power of hearing, the infirm and crippled have been made whole through the divine intervention of St. Anne.

**(4) Patroness of the Childless:** Women pray to St. Anne for children, because Sts. Anne and Joachim after a long wait received Mary, the child of grace, from God. It is also believed that Sts. Anne and Joachim were expelled from the Temple because they were childless. Full of

compassion for those in like sorrow, she intercedes with God, and if it is God's will, she obtains for them God's gift of a child.

**(5) Help of the Pregnant:** The faithful firmly believe that St. Anne guards the fruit of the womb, so that the child may receive the sacrament of baptism. She assists mothers when they are in great anxiety, and she obtains for them a happy delivery.

**(6) Model of Married Women and Mothers:** St. Anne is the shining example of all Christian women, because she lived to perfection her vocation as the wife St. Joachim and mother of the Blessed Virgin. She specially protects married women and mothers, as she herself had borne the heavy burdens of the married state and tasted all the bitterness, which makes this vocation difficult.

She obtains for women, especially in today's misguided age, the light to understand the high purpose of Christian marriage and she helps women to accept children as a gift or blessing from God.

**(7) Protectress of Widows:** The state of a widow is difficult in today's world. She stands alone in the world without the support of her husband and children. If she is poor, she is doubly needy. The Bible asks us to be compassionate to the widows. St. Anne cares for the spiritual as well as material needs of the widows. Hence, Christian widows feel drawn to place themselves under her powerful protection.

**(8) Patroness of Labourers:** Many labourers today consider St. Anne as their special Protectress. For instance, the sculptors venerate her as their model. They have chosen as their emblem the image of St. Anne teaching the child Mary, with these words inscribed beneath: *Thus she wrought the Tabernacle of God.* For every Christian sculptor, the Tabernacle, the dwelling of God, is in a certain sense, the masterpiece of his art.

These are largely the exterior signs of the powerful and maternal goodness of St. Anne. Besides these, there are innumerable spiritual blessings known to God alone, which Christians have experienced through the intercession of St. Anne. How many times has she not strengthened a wavering courage, given new vitality to a dying spiritual life, opened a mind to the light of true faith? Good St. Anne, like a true and faithful mother, does not turn a deaf ear to the pleas of her children. As a mother's heart is deeply touched at the sight of the affliction of her children, so is St. Anne's motherly heart touched by the petitions of those who come to her seeking solace and comfort.

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