

Standing by the cross of Jesus with his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. (Jn 19.25b-27)

In St John's account of the Passion, these verses are not simply an historical detail. They bring into the story, to the heart of the story, a moment of humanity and compassion after the horrors, the mockery and cynicism of the arrest, trial, condemnation and crucifixion of Jesus. The great mediaeval hymn *Stabat Mater* (New English Hymnal 97) is a moving reflection on the scene, inviting us to take our stand with Mary and experience with her both the sheer anguish of seeing Jesus die and the glorious hope that comes to us through the Cross.

This must have been the moment above all when Mary understood Simeon's prophecy that "a sword will pierce through your own soul" (Lk 2.35). But I wonder whether she also remembered the wedding at Cana, when Jesus had said to her "Woman, what have you do with me?" before his first miracle in which he turned water into wine? (Jn 2.1-11).

"Woman" is not quite the abrupt form of address it might seem an English; in fact it might even have rather affectionate tone - as for example when Jesus addressed the Canaanite woman whose daughter Jesus had healed (Mt 15.28). In St John's gospel however, it is only at Cana and here from the cross that Jesus addresses his mother as "Woman." These two events stand at the beginning and the end of his public ministry. At Cana, he had said, "My hour has not yet come," and the whole incident is presented as a revelation of Christ's glory and a foretaste of the "new wine" of his future kingdom. Calvary was the "hour" of Jesus, when he was lifted up in order to draw everyone to himself.

We cannot know of course what was going through Mary's mind (and heart) on the first Good Friday. But we can make our own the words of the *Stabat Mater*, and in particular the verse:

*In the Passion of my Maker,
Be my sinful soul partaker,
May I bear with her my part;
Of his Passion bear the token,
In a spirit bowed and broken
Bear his death within my heart.*