



To Recapture the Dream

The Spiritual journey and heritage of Mary Potter

Founder of the Little Company of Mary

SECTION 2

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Section Two: Forming the Heart of the Institute

Introduction:

Over the years of Mary Potter's growth into union with God, she had been learning a melody that was to be sung in the world. A song was to be created that was to be sung by those whose voices could carry the tune, who could harmonise the different parts, and who would, together, create 'the most marvellous melody'. If this was to be done, it was important that the tune be learnt, so that as the various parts were integrated into the whole, its central theme would not be lost. Once Mary Potter had gained the blessing of the Church upon her vision and dream, she could begin teaching that melody to those who came to her - those who had been called to follow her in this singing of the Lord's own song in the world in which they lived.

One of the most consistent thoughts in the writings of Mary, was the notion that religious life - each expression of religious life - had its own grace, its own blessedness, and that one of the most important things for any group of religious men or women to do, was to remain faithful to the song each had been given to sing. In one of the first conferences given to her followers she wrote:

To ask why there are so many orders might be answered by the questions: Why are there so many and various kinds of flowers? Each flower has its own peculiar beauty, and is distinct from the others. This is God's design, and in the beginning when he commanded the earth to bring forth fruit after its own kind, creation, according to this divine will, looked beautiful with its various plants and flowers, each of a distinct kind. So, in God's new creation - the Church - each flower must have its own particular sweetness, each fruit its own taste, if his design and will are corresponded with. Why do I dwell on this? Because it is important to recollect that our perfection consists in corresponding with the designs of God in our regard. (M.C. 2, p.20)

Perfection, for Mary Potter was simply conforming to the desire God has for us. That, of course, required the desire to know what God's will was, and then to follow it. For one who was called to the religious life, it was necessary that they first know the spirit and end of the institute to which they came, and then to respond to it. Mary wrote thus:

God, having led a person into a religious community which has a certain end and spirit, along with some special devotion, would not inspire her with such attractions as I have suggested before. No - God expects the religious to have the same devotion and spirit as the order to which she has been called.(M.C. ibid.)

If that spirit was lacking in the individual, or if they found they could not accept the aim and ideal of the institute, and after having consulted with their director, it was, in the view of Mary Potter, their duty to leave (M.C. P.22). Why? Because “the will of God is the melody of earth, (and) our wills must harmonise with this dear will, - then sweet music is made, even on this sinful earth” (ibid.)

To know the heart of the institute to which the new members of the congregation were drawn meant that Mary had to clearly define the pattern that the plan of God had laid down in her mind. From the moment of its inception, Mary stated clearly that she had been called by God to found a society within the Church, that had its own unique identity. It was no borrowed model, but a unique plan:

“The Little Company of Mary is a direct impress from the Most high. God visited my room with a series of marvels and simple as I was, unread in mystical theology, or even ordinary writings upon devotion, I knew that God's manifestation to me meant something great, something indeed of moment.” (A.N.Vol.1, p.11)

The something great was the new institute. Mary set about instructing her first followers in what would remain the central focus of the institute - the gift it brought to the Church and to the world.

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When Mary Potter began instructing the first members of her small band in 1877, at the request of “our father and director” (Bishop Bagshawe), she did so in order to ensure that “in the many matters of the day, our many works and various duties, we might (not) lose sight of the object, the special spirit and end of our institute”. The members who came to join the little society were ordinary women. Some had been married and widowed, others were young and single. Some came because they knew Mary Potter and shared a vision with her, others, because they were drawn to give their lives to God, but were unsure or where or how, or because they were recommended by their Bishop. There were some who sought entry who had failed in other institutes of religion, but were determined to try again. If the society was to get off the ground, and assume its truth, the members all had to realise that a plan had been laid. Firstly, everyone had to understand that - in accordance with the principles long established (and still true)- the principal end of any form of Christian life, and more especially that form of Christian life lived under vow, was the perfection of its members. Mary wrote:

First and foremost, the end we have in view, is to perfect ourselves - and how? By the imitation of Jesus and Mary. We are especially bound to imitate our Crucified Lord and his martyred Mother on Calvary. This is the final end to which we are tending. We aspire to become spouses of Jesus Crucified.” (M.C. 3., p.29)

The road to perfection, and to the high vocation of being bound to the mystery of the redemption, by being 'bound to Jesus Crucified' had been trodden before - other men and women had embraced the life of the religious. Still others had formulated ways of living lives of consecration and dedication. Mary Potter had found such a way of living a committed life, and this was to be the Path for those who were called to such an imitation of Jesus and Mary, as she had elaborated in her plan for the congregation.

From her earliest conception of the society, Mary had seen that True Devotion was the way the Little Company was called to follow Christ. De Montfort had laid down a spiritual pathway that was deceptive in its simplicity, ruthless in its radicality. Mary Potter had herself entered upon the path and had experienced high graces. By following the principles of De Montfort, she had become free to accept the voice of God within her. She had experienced the pain of stripping away the mask of self and self control the pain of abandoning herself to the hands of another, that God's will be done in her and she knew that this spirituality would be the corner-stone upon which the foundation of the society would be built. Writing to her brother Henry, she said:

I intend True Devotion should form the spirit of our Little Society, so that we might all have one spirit among us - the spirit of Mary - and that anyone who did not like this devotion, and would not adopt it, should not remain.
(Selley Correspondence, Undated letter from Southsea)

To Father Selley she had written:

The devotion to our Lady that I speak of would make them saints in the world.....It is simply our Lord's devotion to Mary. You give yourself entirely to our Lady, body and soul and all, once and for all, and depend on her as Jesus did....I have such confidence in this devotion, that give me a soul willing to embrace it (I do not say even like it...) not matter what the defects of that soul, it will be entirely changed. I am very anxious to spread the devotion.(Selley Letters, June 13, 1876).

What Mary grasped clearly, was that the path of Mary, as expressed by De Montfort, was a renewal of the consecration of the person made in Baptism, but a renewal made with full intent to BE what that Baptismal consecration called forth - a new creation in God. At the same time, however, the determination to live according to the reality of Baptism, was not possible by human means alone. Help was needed, and that help lay in the person of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and in a program of life that would at all times bring one back to the purpose of that Baptismal consecration given us by God.

Baptism is regeneration, a new birth. We can be baptized but once but though we cannot twice receive Baptism, we can renew its effect within us whenever we please. Thus it is with the devotion recommended it is a marvellous 'secret' of grace. Its effects in the soul are truly wonderful, but these are not seen all at once, and the 'transformation' caused in the soul does not take place at once and likewise the graces which it is promised will be given (to those who adopt the devotion), are given, according to the co-operation of each soul with the graces given (that is) - according to the spirit with which the soul enters and continues in the Path of Mary.(Spiritual

Exercises, p.44, USA ed.)

De Montfort had systematised a teaching, long present in the Church, that a way to holiness - a way of living the fullness of the Christian life - was to go to Jesus through Mary. Mary, for De Montfort was the perfect expression of a true 'child of God' - dependent upon him, trusting in him, faithful to him, joyful with him. Her relationship with the Father - brought about by a true knowledge of herself as creature of the Creator, enabled the Word of God to be born firstly in her heart, as Augustine says, and then in her womb.

She was - in spirit and truth - the perfect expression of the Gospel 'little one' who realized that, by herself, life was impossible, but who also knew that with God all things were possible. The wonderful gift and example of the Mother of Jesus, was that she possessed the freedom given to those who have total dependence upon God, and who understand, with that dependence, that they are independent of everything else in the universe. For such a one, there is only God and the desires of God's heart. Human respect, human regard, vanishes, in the knowledge that it is only God who truly IS.

For Mary Potter, such a perception of the Mother of God, enabled her to see that it was to just such a 'little one' that the Word came. Jesus came to Mary, to be born of her, because she was dependent upon nothing other than God. The virgin of Nazareth - by owning completely her dependence upon the Most High God had received the promise of the beatitude: The kingdom of heaven was indeed hers, in the conception of Jesus. It was the belief of Mary Potter, that if this woman had the humility and grace sufficient to attract God so completely to herself - if God had seen fit to trust his Son to Mary, could we not trust ourselves to her, that she might take us to the Son and to the Father? If the "Most High God" had taken Mary for Mother - should we not also? For Mary Potter, the answer was "Yes"!:

You wish to imitate Jesus, by giving yourself to Mary. Now behold how Jesus, like other children was under the influence of his mother in the womb. He was there formed by the operation of the Holy Spirit. The sweet soul and spirit of Mary was possessed by the Holy Spirit of God. As naturally the thoughts, wishes and feelings of a mother influence her unborn child, so it was with Jesus in the womb of Mary, she receiving from on high - from the Father and from the Eternal Word - the Holy Spirit. (Spiritual Exercises, p. 45 USA ed.)

The spirituality of the Path, was that the soul would give itself to Mary, as had God himself, with humility and grace. It would be formed into the full reality of its new life through the power of the Spirit. Because Baptismal consecration brought us to embryonic life in Christ, and as Mary is the Mother of Christ, the mother of all Christians, she would act as cooperator in this life of grace. Mary Potter saw Mary as having a functional role in the order of salvation. Mary, the Mother of Jesus and the Mother of his people, longs for her own children to be born of the light that is Christ she longs to protect them, in the same manner as she protected and nurtured her Son, Jesus. But the one who sought to enter into this devotion, had to be prepared to be changed, to be moulded:

The act (of consecration) has to work a change in them Mary has to throw the mantle of her maternal protection specially round the soul now her very own. She is anxious to work in that soul to influence it, to bring the Holy Spirit to press and invigorate, and form it to a new life. But the soul must be pliable, docile it must be ready to be moulded. If it is stubborn, self-willed, rigid, how can it be moulded into the likeness of Jesus? How can Mary

influence it? (ibid)

Mary Potter had, as we have seen, a great love of the Mother of God. She understood - seemingly instinctively - the right relationship between the Mother and the Son, and she knew from her own experience, that Mary would be with those who thus entrusted themselves to her, to be raised by her, into the fullness of their discipleship - bound to Christ Crucified, fools for Christ's sake, and for the sake of the kingdom. And, as it had taken Jesus time to bring to fulfillment the mission with which he had been entrusted, and as Mary had gently led her son through the years of his growing, she would also lead those who were called to follow him. There was time to grow into the fullness of life:

“Those who enter this little society”(wrote Mary), “will not be required to enter at once into its full spirit, that is to say, the spirit of Calvary. It may be some years before they are prepared to do so. The preparatory step will be to enter the Path of Mary, as little Children, and to be born again of her. They will then consecrate themselves entirely to her Maternal Heart, to be disposed of, body and soul, according to her wish.”(Conferences “M”, p.8)

The benefits of entering the Path were many, but for Mary Potter, the ultimate benefit was that this spiritual path would bring the individual to his or her own greatness and glory. In her eyes, each person had a distinct and singular call to holiness, and the happiness of an individual's life was in direct proportion to the ability of that individual to live life, according to the will of God - that is, in union with Himself:

When the self is subdued, when we have fought with it and brought it down, when we have made room for Jesus, by having cast out our self love, then all does indeed seem easy, then our lives indeed become beautiful....We carry heaven within us, for where Jesus is, there is heaven, and Jesus dwells in the soul that is emptied of self. He is, to the persons who thus possess him, as their very heart..... you will likewise love others, for you will see and rejoice in his grace in them thus you will love them, since you love his grace in them and having love, your soul will please God and thus replenished with love, you will let your light of love shine before the world.(op cit p48)

By their act of consecration, those who entered into this path had renewed their desire to live lives according to the spirit and truth of their Baptism. The constant living out of this willed act would then enable them to grow into union. Mary wrote that “what the soul has principally to do, is to leave room for this seed to grow, not to plant over it, but to leave it plenty of room, to water it, to tend the little sprout when it appears, to use every natural means, and so, gradually to cause to fructify the seed sown within it....(but)....as we have to perform acts in order to acquire the habit of virtue, so with this devotion. Let people first resolve - not generally or vaguely, - to perform all they do in union with Jesus and Mary. (M. C. 13, p. 125)

What the way of going to Jesus through Mary will bring to the soul is “a remarkable union with God, a sweet simplicity and liberty which will be, at the same time, joyous and modest, and having a demeanor natural and unaffected.”(op. cit 5. P.50) It would be the means of bringing that soul into the liberty of spirit that brought joy to the world:

Those who live more by the Spirit of God than their own, are according to God's own heart. Those who live in the company of Mary will ever do this, as she did, who lived and spoke to the Holy Spirit, who “possessed her in the

beginning of her ways". All therefore who walk in the "Path of Mary" will possess this holy liberty.....(op.cit. p. 189)

This liberty of spirit would enable the soul to live in truth and joy before God. In a way, it would restore to the soul the grace of Adam and Eve, who enjoyed the gifts of union with God until their own sin, their own precocity and self will drew them from him. Those who possess such liberty of spirit, would gain the ability to live life without excess - living the virtue of meekness - in so far as meekness means the ability to live the mean, the balance between over-reaction and total passivity. It would mean living the truth of absolute trust and confidence in God.

What Mary Potter believed with all her heart, was that the Path of Mary would be the means not only of binding her followers to their God, and leading them into the joys of union. It would also be the means of binding the community together. They would truly be one in the heart of Mary, for if each individual member was drawn to love God with all her heart, it was a natural follow-through that she would love the other with all her heart as well. The 'grand effect' of this devotion would be the ability to live with each other in true charity:

You will love with every beat of your heart, where Jesus lives in love you will pour out his love upon those outside you will see God everywhere you will see him in his creatures, you will love him in them. you could not cherish a hard thought of a creature God loved. You could not, possessing within you, the Holy Spirit of love, think hard thoughts, speak harsh word - you will have a kind look for all, a kind word, a kind deed. We should then do good. Again and again it might be said:

"If you would save your brother, love him", thus our love will unconsciously show itself, it could not be kept in. "See how these Christians love one another," it was said of old. Oh yes, and let it be said of Mary's own they love one another in word, in deed, and in truth." (op.cit., p. 48)

Mary Potter saw that the spiritual growth of the individual was the key to the development of the community, and to the blessedness of community life. She understood that the souls of her followers, like her own, would be led to different points at different times, and that each would experience and express her relationship to God in a unique manner. If the graces that would be given were corresponded to, then the little society would be conforming to the spirit implanted within it by God - the expression of the human life of Jesus and Mary:

We wish in our Lady's little Company to represent on earth the life of our Lord and our Lady. The greater part of our Lord's life was made up of simple, and to outward appearances, natural actions. Our Lady too was occupied in actions of an ordinary kind. But while outwardly occupied like other persons, what a difference there was interiorly. What a life of love, suffering and sacrifice there was within. Calvary had already begun in each heart.....Thus is should be with Mary's own. The united company will together manifest to God the life of Jesus and Mary. Some of its members may be called by God to go through all the various states of life of our Lord and our Lady. Some more especially drawn to one of those states than to another....In our Little Company, the holy spirit will fashion the saint at will. The various members may all be alike and yet all different. All alike in simplicity, in liberty, in love, yet each differing in some particular way from the others, by being in a different

spiritual state, or in its passage from one state to another. Yet all together will make up a whole, well pleasing to the good God. (M.C. 10., p.111-112)

The common feature of the spirituality of the members then would be the attitude of heart that was at the core of True Devotion. Abandonment to the will of God. This abandonment to God, through the hands of Mary would bring to the society one great feature Mary Potter had already accepted within her own life, namely simplicity. Simplicity was a virtue of the child of God. It was an expression of those who were truly poor in spirit. The simplicity which Mary Potter saw in the Mother of God was the model to be acquired, and that Mother would inculcate it in her members:

Our Lady leads her own, and the Path she leads them, in being trodden first by Jesus, therefore is replete with graces. She leads them the path walked by the Blessed in heaven, and those who walk it are blessed already on earth. Our Lord's voice proclaimed it so, for so our Lord's own words tell us. They deliver their souls and body and all they possess. They make an offering of all to our Lady. Their voluntary spoiling of themselves of their goods, both interior and exterior, make them 'poor in spirit', whom our Lord has pronounced blessed. We might go through the various beatitudes, showing how our Lady leads her own on through one after another. She is the Mother of Mercy, therefore her children must be merciful. She is the Immaculate Mother, therefore her children must be pure of heart - upright. She is the Mother of the Prince of Peace. She teaches her children to imitate their brother Jesus, and breathe peace wherever they go, and she permeates their own souls in peace, teaching them how to suffer patiently, to bear persecutions, filling them with holy hope that the kingdom of heaven is theirs. (A.N. Vol.3.)

Allowing Mary to act thus within the soul would bring the individual to her perfection - that is, bring her into conformity with the image of God she was created to be - and at the same time, unite the members together, because of the charity that would be generated by each member knowing - through her own experience, the struggle, the sacrifice and the joy that united them. There would be, within the congregation, a true sense of being one in the heart of their Mother Mary. Furthermore, entry into the Path of Mary - the deliberate renewing of Baptismal consecration, and the willed desire to live the life of a truly God-regenerated being, would lead the followers of this path into their original blessedness. It would lead to an understanding of the truth of the place of every human being in creation. Mary wrote to her followers:

(This path) will serve to keep you in your proper place in creation. You are a work of God, you are therefore bound to give him glory. You are bound to give him service. You were made for God, therefore you should seek to live for him alone, and not live for yourself. (P.O.M.p.79)

Not only would it bring the individual to an understanding of their being-in-God, it would also bring them to the joy of their creation in that God. The desire of Mary Potter's heart was that the members of this little Society would truly express to the world the wonder of what the Christian life - when lived in union with God - could really be. She believed, as the Church believes, that the Christian community - and in this case - the religious community, would be the radical expression of the wonder of human life. Thus she desired that the little society would lead.....

a simple and natural life, not an extraordinary life, but a very simple one. I mean religious life, so far as religious

means 'binding', but that is not a very extraordinary thing. It is a very natural thing to be bound. If Adam and Eve had not sinned, we should all have been thus bound, that is to say, we should have belonged so entirely to God, we should ever have felt so consecrated to him, that the formal binding would not have been necessary. We should have been as little children playing before a loving God, sporting and abounding in our liberty in the life of love given by the good creator to his happy creatures, and yet, not selfish in our happiness, since every joy would produce from God's sinless children, an act of love and thanksgiving to their good Father, their own joy would but have made them rejoice the more in his. (Conference "M" Compendium of the Rule, p. 32)

The understanding Mary Potter had of True Devotion was that it was a radical way of living the Christian life. In the Path of Mary - written to encourage others to enter into this 'sweet way of Mary', that they may become 'other Christ's', she had pointed out that:

"If you give yourself thus, after the example of Jesus to Mary, she will in return give you the power to give a new life to Jesus. He will be born and live within you, so that henceforth you may say: I live now, not I, but it is Christ who lives within me. The Eternal Word will be spiritually conceived in you, therefore will God the Father, bending over you, encompass you with jubilee, and pour forth upon you his holy spirit." (P.O.M. p.22-23)

De Montfort had written that in this devotion "we do more than is done in a religious order. In religious orders we give God the goods of fortune by the vow of poverty, the goods of the body by the vow of chastity, our own will by the vow of obedience, and sometimes the liberty of body by the vow of cloister. But we do not, by these vows give Him the liberty or the right to dispose of the value of our good works and we do not strip ourselves, as far as a Christian person can do, of that which is dearest and most precious to him, namely the satisfaction and impetratory parts of his actions." (Cited in P.O. M. p.46)

What this meant for Mary Potter, in terms of the Little Company, was that the offering that was to be made was a total abandonment, a radical offering, a willingness to be used for God's own purpose. Mary Potter's understanding of the radical abandonment of this Path of Mary, meant several things. Firstly, the Path of Mary was a way of living the Christian life in its fullness. Therefore it was a way of living the Gospel, and of becoming Gospel for the world. It was, therefore, not a way that was restricted to religious life. It was a way for all people, and a way of bringing all people into their own beauty and truth - it was therefore a way of evangelization. Thus she would say:

We were not founded in God's kingdom simply to nurse, that is an addition. We were founded to extend the kingdom of God on earth, by making Mary reign in the hearts and minds of men.(Unpublished Conference on the Confraternity of Calvary)

Secondly, if the members of the Little Company were called to live the reality of this consecration in the world, then they were called to share it. There should be no fear of allowing others to come to be 'trained' in this way of living the spiritual life. The Mother of Jesus would lead her own into the place either in the world or in the convent, in which they would give their God the glory they were called to give: Again she wrote:

I particularly wish that few postulants should be refused admission to try their vocation. They will all be led into the Path of Mary, and thus do incalculable service to their souls, and if they find that their vocation is for the world, they will return to it, to live over again the wondrously sweet domestic life of Mary. They will go through the Spiritual Exercises, and can return at any time for a retreat. The “sanctuary of Mary's heart” must be a place of refuge, a place of retreat for members in the world who will come and be consecrated to Mary (M.C. 24, p. 247)

Thirdly, there would be those who entered the Path of Mary who would be called to a realisation of their consecration to Jesus through Mary, by being called to Calvary - there to be bound with Jesus on the Cross. These individuals would be willingly consecrated Victims - offering their lives that others may have life. Yet not all of these would be called to live under religious vows. There would be those 'victim souls' who would be espoused to Jesus without the formulas of religious profession, and without the support of a community life. These would be the 'lay associates' of the congregation. Mary Potter had no illusions about the fact that the world was the meeting place of God and souls. She wrote:

There is a mistaken idea in many who desire perfection, that it is not to be found in the world. In this they are wrong. People may attain as high a perfection (and certainly, since perfection consists in doing the will of God, a higher perfection) in the world as in the cloister. There can be no doubt that if it is God's will they should remain in the world, he will give them grace to perfect themselves there, for perfection is to be attained by our corresponding to whatever it is that God wills for us. (M.C. 24, p. 254)

Those who were called to be spouse of Jesus Crucified in the convent - through the public acceptance of a commitment which cut across the legitimate pleasures of material wealth, by poverty the joy of earthly love, by virginity, and the secret blessedness of one's own self-assertion, through obedience, were called, not to a higher vocation, simply a different one. To such as these, was given the task of standing watch over the world, and of reproducing in their lives and in their communities, the truth of the reality of the kingdom alive and active in the world. They were called to a radical expression of the Incarnation and Redemption their lives a single-hearted expression of love. These members of the congregation would take upon themselves the formal binding of religious life they would be Spouse of Jesus Crucified, and live their consecration within the radical structure of religious community. They had received a special call of witness to publicly reproduce the life of sacrifice and impetration of Jesus and Mary on Calvary. Mary wrote:

Let the few who join the highest part of this work of Mary for the good of holy Church, be those who have been well tried, who have suffered long. (M.C. 24, p. 246).

Those who were called to this new life in the Church were called to be truly bound, and their binding was to a Crucified Lord.

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If the members of the society had been called to be one in the Heart of Mary - that is, bound together by a common

spirituality which drew them all into the Mother heart of Mary to be formed into the image of Christ (and therefore drawn into a commonly held belief regarding the nature of the Christian life and Marian discipleship), they were also called to a unique vocation to be Spouse of Jesus Crucified. While *we* might recoil at this imagery, for Mary Potter, the term had a singular meaning, one that was essentially linked to the spiritual path they had been called to follow.

Having entered the Path of Mary, those who sought to follow the plan of God for the society would “take time to consider and consult with their director as to whether they feel themselves called to take the next step that follows in our Little Society, namely to follow Mary on the Way of the Cross, there to watch as she did, Jesus dying, there to pray as she did in union with Him, Father forgive them....there to join their hearts as she did hers with the agonising heart of Jesus, and be united with him so closely, that henceforth their place of abode will be on the Cross in the heart of Jesus. (On Formation, Conferences “M”, p.8)

Union with Jesus on the Cross was a particular manner of living life, and Mary Potter had been given an understanding, that the members of the Little Company were called to a unique relationship with the Cross of Christ. On Calvary, Jesus had gained the redemption of humanity. On Calvary, by the willing obedience of the Son to the Father, the Mercy of God had been poured out, that the world be renewed into the blessedness God had created it to be. On Calvary, Mary, who had been made the spouse of the Holy Spirit and the mother of the redeemer, at the moment of the Annunciation, becomes truly the Mother of all the redeemed - all those who are born in the spirit, through the water and the blood (the Mercy) of God, incarnated in Christ. If followers of the Path of Mary, had been called into religious life to be co-redeemers with Christ, they must, of necessity, embrace the same Cross that Jesus had embraced, and suffer the life of contradiction that he, the Saviour of the world had suffered. They had to be willing to undergo the suffering and struggle, necessary for disciples, to bring Christ to birth in their own lives and in the lives of others.

To be a spouse of Jesus Crucified was not to seek out suffering, but rather, to do what Jesus had done walk the earth telling of the good news of the Father's love and revealing the coming of the kingdom through every action of life. Writing of this Mary Potter stated that

“those who...have been vowed and united to Jesus on the Cross will henceforth live in a constant union with him - (a union) of thought, desire and feeling. That is to say, his thoughts during those three hours, his desires, his feelings will be theirs for the remainder of their lives. They will never seek to come down from that Cross where his love has called them, and where their Mother has placed them. If Mary has obtained that certain of her own should, by a special grace of predilection on the part of God, be called to so high and holy a vocation as to be spouses of Jesus, and to stand with herself on Calvary, those who have received this great grace cannot be too careful to correspond with it, and by daily more and more studying the interior dispositions of our Lord and his mother (though these two are really one), will, day by day, enter more fully into the spirit of their Institute. (Conference “M”, On Formation p.8)

Mary Potter had said that this life was no extraordinary thing, but if it was lived to the full, it would indeed be a life of suffering - a life of crucifixion, for it was the ready willingness of one who loved so strongly, that they would seek to embrace the world, and who would be willing, in that love, to give their lives that others might have life. The spouse of

Jesus crucified would unite her whole being to the same ends that Jesus and Mary had on Calvary. Mary wrote:

Jesus on Calvary opened his Sacred Heart and poured forth its treasure of Precious blood...he did it with a special intent of drawing upon us the sinful unworthy children of the earth, the great gift of his Holy Spirit. Let us humbly remind the Eternal Father of this wish of the Heart of Jesus. Let us, in union with Mary, show our Father in heaven this desire of our Lord in his death agony, that the Holy Spirit might speak and live in the hearts of those whose nature he had assumed, and to whom he made himself a brother. We who devote ourselves to live with Jesus and Mary on Calvary, must enter into their Sacred hearts that our own may be filled with their wishes and intentions. The Heart of Jesus was filled with love for the whole human race, and therefore did it suffer and empty itself of its Precious Blood, to obtain for us what alone could fit us for heaven, for eternal life with himself....the gift of God's spirit.(M.C. 14, p.152)

Those who were called to be spouse of Christ Crucified were called to have the 'same mind in them, as was in Christ Jesus'. They were called to be willing victims, that the mercy of God may be poured upon the world, and that the gift of the Spirit may be given to all of the family of Jesus. A true spouse of Jesus must follow the lamb of God on earth as much as she hopes to follow him in heaven.

Following means literally walking in another's footsteps, imitating their actions, or being guided by their example. Following the Man of Sorrows therefore, necessarily means a life of poverty, subjection and contradiction.(B.C. Part Two, p.53 USA Ed. 1957)

To understand the insistence of Mary Potter, on the role and meaning of the Cross in the life of the members of the society, it has to be remembered that Mary herself had experienced, as we all must experience, the personal nature of the Crucifixion of Christ. She had been graced with the realisation that, on Calvary, Christ had died for her, as well as for humanity. She had come to understand the fact that the Son of God came to save her - as if there was no one else to save, and in coming to understand herself as being loved with such great love, she sought to respond as fully as she could. The Cross was the place where she had been bound in love with her Lord and Saviour. For those who were called to follow her path through that narrow gate, the pattern would be the same: She wrote: "There is no place, no time of his life on earth where we love Him as on Calvary. It is there he bound us to himself" (O.L.R. p.195).

To find oneself in the Cross of Christ, was to be found by Love Incarnate, but it was also to find the place of being-with Christ. Mary wrote of the necessity of those who are drawn into this union with God, to clearly understand the responsibility that is theirs. In a dialogue with Christ on the Cross, it is as if Jesus impresses upon her these words: " My child, if though wilt remain with me on the Cross, thou must suffer with me on it." (Mary's Call, P. 198) This was the truth of the one who comes to understand the nature of the Act of the Redemption. To love a crucified Lord is to embrace the total folly of the Cross, and the folly of a God who loves such frail and sinful people, enough to die for them. It is to love with the same love to live with the same desire. Mary Potter's own response we have already seen. For those who would follow, this union with the Heart of Christ crucified was to be the reality of their spiritual lives:

Our Lord called the hour of his Passion emphatically his hour. It is likewise the holy hour of his spouses. It is

termed Sacred it is so. The soul that has come to this sacred hour, that is united, not alone for time, but for eternity, to the Lord of heaven and earth, and united with Him on the Cross, is likewise sacred it is set apart it is united to Jesus suffering on the earth, to be united with Jesus glorified in heaven. Happy vocation, given not to all. The soul has sunk deep into the wounded side of Jesus. It is united for ever to his strong loving heart. When it speaks, it is not a long way off the spouse of Jesus speaks to the God of her heart, to the Heart of her God within her, the God in whom she lives more than in herself.(O.L.R. p.199)

To follow Jesus to the Cross meant to be nailed with him by the sufferings willingly endured for the salvation of souls. More still, it meant that the individual member was called to offer even her life, if that would serve the will of God to bring another soul into grace and goodness. Mary Potter was insistent upon this understanding of suffering, because the desire of Christ's heart that none may be lost, was part and parcel of the vocation of the spouse of Jesus Crucified. She was called to offer her sufferings - spiritual, emotional, physical, for the salvation of souls. Writing to her sisters, Mary Potter said:

In reading our Rule or having it explained to us, we may find that we did not realise all that it requires of us. I think many of you will find that your Rule says: "in union with the Sacrifice of Mary at the foot of the Cross, where Jesus shed his Precious Blood for the salvation of the world" (First Rule Part 1., Chapter 1.) and that this has not been seriously enough thought of and practised...that you have not distinctly offered yourselves as victims in union with the great Victim for us all.(Conferences on the Rule, Conferences "M". p.89)

In spirit and in truth, the members of this community were called to be 'victim souls': They were to offer themselves daily, within the context of Eucharist, to be bread for the hungry and wine for those who thirst, just as Jesus had. However, it is easy to distort the reality of what this kind of vocation of suffering means. It is easy to diminish it and reduce it to 'offering-up' trials and tribulations, but for Mary Potter it was a very real and very demanding ascetism.

Through the courageous bearing of all kinds of trials, with the heart and mind fixed upon bringing relief of soul and body to another, there was the radical commitment of Gospel discipleship. Only great love can respond to Calvary. Only a real realisation of the love with which I am loved can bring me to that place. Equally however, only a great love and a great desire to live the same sort of life that Jesus lived could keep the soul on Calvary. To live as 'spouse of Jesus Crucified was to live in union with the thoughts, desires and feelings of Jesus. To do this, the soul had to enter into the Calvary moment completely, to understand the undying constancy of it. Then would come the realization of the absolute nature of Calvary, when every breath, every heartbeat was one of anguish and love. On Calvary there is a suffering that is personal (I thirst) a suffering that is for 'the other' (Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do) a suffering that is the dark night of despair and solitude (My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?).

Bound mystically to the Cross with her Lord, the spouse of Jesus would see her world with Jesus' eyes. She would come to understand the depth of love that brought Christ to his Passion, and would come to share his vision for the world, and her role within that vision. Once bound, the one who had been called to this place would experience the heart-longing of God, for the salvation of his people. Like her Lord, the spouse of Jesus Crucified would have her eyes wide open to see the reality the results of sin in the world. She had been called to emulate her Saviour and Jesus did not have his eyes closed

on Calvary. From the Cross he looked upon his earth, his people. He suffered with them and in them. The call to be spouse of Jesus Crucified meant that the task was to look upon the world with the same love, the same pain, the same anguish, and to endure the suffering, that the pain of the world might cease. More still, it was to offer oneself - in practical terms - that Christ was not crucified in his people. In practical terms, it was to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to seek out the lost and the abandoned, to stand against the agents of sin and division in the world. And if that leads to a personal crucifixion - a personal dying, at the hands of others who do not understand, or choose not to understand, then so be it.

This concept of being Spouse of Jesus Crucified cannot lead us to a passive 'delighting in the Lord' for our own sakes, it can only lead us - as it led Jesus - to our own personal Calvary. It breaks apart what Mary Potter herself called a "spirituality sensuality" (Mary's Call, Introduction), and forces the soul into action.

For Mary Potter, the epitome of such a love and such a union of heart and will and suffering that was to be expressed by the spouse of Jesus Crucified, was to be found in the woman who was the first among the faithful.....Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

In her writing on the Mother of Jesus, Mary Potter had pointed out that it was Calvary that brought Mary out of her retirement. The love of the Mother for the Son had drawn her to this place of total abnegation. On Calvary, the Mother of Jesus, united herself with her Son She shared his pain she witnessed the birth of the Church, in the Spirit, from the outpouring of Mercy from the wounded side of Christ she had herself been missioned, by that action of grace, to become Mother of the Church. She was drawn into the Calvary experience not simply as a bystander, but as an active participant. The loves of Jesus' heart were her loves. His pain, hers. His longing, hers also. For Mary Potter, the Mother of Jesus assumed a new dimension on Calvary. Here the sword of sorrow pierced her heart, and she became the Mother of Sorrow, the Mother of Pity, the Mother of Mercy. The members of Mary's Little Company were called to learn of Mary in this moment too. They were to be as 'other Mary's' in the world. They were to embrace her dispositions of mind and heart, and were then to emulate her stance on Calvary. But what did Calvary really mean for the Mother of Jesus? Mary Potter's vision of the Mother of the Lord on Calvary was as one perfectly tuned to the desire of the Son. We can tend to forget that the Calvary moment was Mary's moment of redemption also. At this point in time and history, she was not simply the Mother of Jesus, but also the Spouse of Jesus Crucified. She stood on Calvary and embraced the agony of watching her son die to save all people. She watched her son die for her! Here she stood in union with him, and knew again the moment of Annunciation, the truth of her own ecce and her fiat. She stood beside her son, received the gift anew, and with the gift the agony of loss:

The Mother of God stands silently by her dying son. Grief enough would it be to watch his anguish were he dying a perfectly natural death, but in that fearfully unnatural death - unnatural because he is hated and murdered by his own people, whom he loved more than his own life - what did she feel? Words and thoughts fail us here. Shame she felt for her people, grief deeper than words for the grief of Jesus, sorrow for this people who were many of them working their own damnation, sorrow that Jesus should lose forever those he was dying to save, sorrow that God the father should be so outraged by his creatures, her heart still clamoring to save those poor unfortunate beings, who, clamoring and shouting blasphemies on Calvary, were courting eternal woe.....Mother, draw us near thee, and make us understand thy suffering.....(O.L.R. p.181).

What Mary Potter always sought to inculcate in her followers, was the fact that the Heart of Mary was ever in tune with

the heart of the Son. Jesus was dying to bring to birth new life in God's grace and goodness. His anguish and pain were willingly endured to achieve that end. Mary, Mother of the Lord - was united with him in that moment of redemptive suffering. For both of them, it was the moment that expressed the reality of something Mary Potter felt was totally real, namely that 'suffering was indeed the touchstone of love.' The willingness to endure all things, to embrace all things, to be patient under all difficulty for the sake of the kingdom, was the truth of being a Spouse of Jesus Crucified, a real 'handmaid of the Lord'.

Again and again Mary Potter returned to the thought that the reality of this could only be experienced if we can see God with the eyes with which God sees us. That kind of humility and truthfulness, however is not within the reach of frail human beings without the graced presence of God to sustain us in the knowledge. One way that is possible to us is that we abandon ourselves to be formed by Mary into another Christ. If Mary is the Mother of the redeemed she is also the nurturer of those redeemed. If she is the Mother of the Church, she is responsible for her children - she has a role and function within the economy of salvation. She is a means of assisting us become our true selves. Those who were called to the Path of Mary would:

Beg of Mary to lend us her heart, that we may love with it her mind that we may think with it and when her thoughts and affections have full possession of us, then that mind will be in us that was in Christ Jesus. And this is what we would have, this is what will make us saints, this is what will make us all God desires we should be, real Christians, real followers of Christ. If the apostle tells us, "Be ye imitators of me, as I also am of Christ" how much more may we refer these words to Mary, the Mother of Christians, the first follower as well as the Mother of Christ." (O.L.R. p.182/3)

On Calvary, that 'first follower', became 'spouse of Christ crucified'. She was, in the Johannine sense, bound in a new way to the mission, ministry and new life of Jesus within his church. If the members of the Little Company were to live their vocation fully, one means of doing that was to learn from Mary how to live on Calvary, and how to embrace a Calvary life in order that others might live. Mary Potter wrote:

If then we would imitate Mary, especially on Calvary, we must beg from the Holy Spirit light and wisdom. Mary on Calvary was flooded with light concerning God's ways. She saw what even she, with all the wisdom she possessed, had never seen before. May be she saw with Jesus the eternal destiny of all, and that as they were presented to her sight, her heart sent forth that cry and prayer for their salvation which was to save souls in every age until the last day. It may be that God in his mercy showed them to the Mother whom he had but just consecrated as Mother of Christians, Mother of the Church, and that Mary was touched with compassion and a cry for Mercy came forth from her heart, such as the Almighty could not disregard at that moment of her intense suffering....(O.L.R. p.183)

At this moment, for Mary Potter, the Mother heart of Mary was filled with agony - agony for her son and his suffering over the lost sheep agony for those children of his (which he had made hers), suffering the loss of the joy of their blessedness in God. At the moment when the Mother heart of the Son, the Mother-love of the Good Shepherd, overflowed with Compassionate love and cried out, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do", the heart of the Mother of

the Son echoed him: “Father, mercy for the miserable, mercy for my children....Most merciful God, show mercy.” (O.L.R. p.184).

This was the prayer of the heart of Jesus and the heart of his mother. It was to be the prayer of the heart of those who were called to embrace the Cross and love with the same self-sacrificing love. Mary Potter wrote to her followers:

It is that prayer Mary's children must continue. Yes, take your place on Calvary view heaven and hell from that sacred mount, and your soul will grow purer in that purifying atmosphere it will grow unselfish, it will expand to something of the grandeur of Mary's soul it will somewhat resemble Mary's, and pour itself out upon others, in love, in earnest, anxious, agonising prayer, and like Mary, gain souls to God. Oh Jesus, we will then, stay and watch with Thee on Calvary. We will remain in loving union with Thee, loving Thee most, where Thou hast most loved us. Close to our Mother on Calvary, close to Thee dear Jesus, our Lord, we will live close to Thee dear Lord, we will die.” (O.L.R. p.185)

Union with Christ on the Cross, the place where Love itself most loved each one of us, was the place of those who had been called to follow Jesus through a total abandonment to him. The abandonment of the vowed member of the Little Company was twofold: Abandonment to Mary to be formed into an image of the Son, abandonment to Jesus, to live his life again on earth through the poverty, the obedience, the radical loving of the single-minded heart that the Cross speaks of to the world. But if the Cross was the place of radical union it was also the place of another dimension of the vocation given to the members of the Little Company. Whilst it was the place of suffering and death, it was also the place of birth. And the members of the Little Company, by their commitment and consecration were called to the same motherhood that Calvary brought to Christ and to his Mother.

To be Mothers to the World [Back](#)

Amongst the graces Mary had received in the formulation of the plan for the Little Company, was the direct instruction from God to “Honour the Heart of my Mother”. This was a working word from God, and like all the graces, was two edged. In the first place, it spoke of the interior life of Mary herself, and of those who would follow her, and secondly, it determined actions which would flow over into the world, and be part of the mission and ministry of the Little Company. So, what did the words “honour the heart of my Mother” mean for Mary Potter?

In the first instance, to honour the heart of the Mother of God, was yet again focused upon a real understanding of the Incarnation. God had indeed become man he had assumed the condition of a slave, in order that his people, who were slaves to sin, might be renewed and reborn in the spirit. The Incarnation of God took place in time and history, and in one sense, it took place because one human being dared to face the abyss of God, and say “Be it done unto me, according to thy word”. In that one, breathtaking moment in time, as Mary Potter herself realised, “heaven began on earth”. (Spiritual Exercises).

Mary Potter loved the Mother of Jesus - not with a pious or extreme sentimentality, but within the context of a high Christology. She understood the awesome gift of God in Christ - the wonder of a God who placed himself in the womb of a human mother, that he might free his people, and glorify them. For Mary Potter, the maternity of Mary was supreme gift. It was part and parcel of the wonder of the Incarnation of the Son. Augustine had cried out: "What an astounding thing, that a creature should have conceived its creator" (Sermon 189:2), Mary Potter would cry out in the same tone of wonder and joy:" What is it then to be a saint?

It is simply to let Jesus come and live in you! Dear Lord, how he loves us!" (S.E. p.147 USA ed.).

For Mary Potter, the Incarnation of Jesus in the womb of Mary was not only the moment of salvation for the people of God, it was also the revelation of who and what each and every person was born to be - a saint, a 'womb enholding God', or as she more whimsically put it, echoing Meister Eckhart: " the nutshell, encasing God" (Life in God's human Family).

What the mother of the Lord had demonstrated in her conception of the Son, by the power of the Spirit, was the deep desire God had, to love his people back to life, and the ability of the human heart to respond to that love. Mary, the chosen vessel of the Lord was open to receive. By her willingness to assume the motherhood of Jesus, she accepted the responsibility of being a saint - i.e. a *real* human being, bound to its creator by generative and loving ties. In this, the mother of Jesus was the model for all Christian life - a model of the receptivity needed to hear the Word of God, to receive it absolutely, and to bear it forth in the flesh, to the world.

From her contemplation of the life of the Mother of Jesus, and her own experience of having been led to Jesus and the Father through Mary, Mary Potter saw that those who would follow her would be called to live the same union of mind and heart and will that was exemplified in Mary, the Mother of the Lord. The sisters would indeed be one in the heart and mind of their mother, and one in the heart and mind of the Son. If the radical obedience of the Cross as well as its poverty were the foundations of the building, its structure would be made of the love and the virtues of their mother Mary's heart. They were to have the same virtues and the same interests as that heart, and as Mary was truly the Mother of the human face of God, she would be the mother of the human face of Christ that dwells in each human soul. What was necessary was that, like Jesus, all must commit themselves to her, and must become an echo of God.

What Mary Potter understood about the reality of Mary's being was that there was but one voice in Mary - God's voice. Her heart was the throne of the Trinity. By her voluntary 'ecce' and 'fiat', the word had become flesh and dwelt among his people! By the voluntary 'ecce' and 'fiat' of those who had been called to the Little Company, they could become Christ bearers - as Mary had been Christ bearer.

In the Mother of Jesus, Mary Potter found the model of the fullness of the Christian life. It was she who in her simplicity and openness to God, had been the one to receive the Word as she was truly the mother of the Son, she was also our Mother, for had not Christ brought us all back into the wonder of our relationship with the Father? were we not with Christ in the womb of Mary? were we not with Christ in the moment of his dying? And, are we not with him in all the moments of his rising? And if we are - are we not with a Mother, whose love for us, is the same love with which she loves the Son, and is, in fact, the same love with which the Son loves us?

Dear Sisters, (Mary Potter wrote), what are we doing? Of what are we thinking if we think not of Jesus and Mary? If you do not love Mary with this Jesus-love, you have him not with you as you should. This love for Mary must be the distinguishing mark of your Institute. A child-like, confiding love of Mary, the mother above all Mothers, the Mother of Jesus. Devotion to the Mother Heart of Mary is what we must pray for, this is what Jesus desires we should love, the heart of his Mother. (M.C. 5., p.47)

This gift of Mary to the Church, which took place on Calvary determined the kind of women the members of the society should be. They too would be Mothers. She had been given a call to “Honour the Heart of My Mother”.

It was a work! Something to be achieved - a transformation, that was at once personal, yet for the world. To honour the heart of the Mother of Jesus, was to imitate it in its virtues, and to live by its desires. In that way, the soul is assured of living according to the desires and wishes of the Son. But the particular grace given to Mary Potter, was to honour that heart of Mary in its Maternity. What did that mean to her and her followers? It meant that they were to learn of the Mother-heart of Mary:- The heart that had conceived the Word, and then enfleshed it within her womb: The heart that received a new word on Calvary: “Woman behold thy son”, and renewed its commitment to nurturing the precious body of her child this time in the person of his brothers and sisters, the Church: This was the heart that would empower and animate the members of the Little Company. By the power of their love and commitment to the people of God, they would act as agents of transformation in the world in which they lived. Through the commitment of a Marian discipleship, the members would seek to sustain, support, encourage and enliven the Church, that the image of Christ that lived within it might reach its full stature. As the Virgin Mary had been missioned by the Spirit in the new moment of her motherhood on Calvary, when she was made Mother of the Church, the members of the Little Company of Mary were missioned to that same Motherhood.

But to imitate the heart of Mary, meant that those who followed the dream that had been implanted in Mary Potter's soul, would have to be intent upon receiving the Word. The attitude called for, was a life of deep contemplation, a life of reflective listening for the still small voice of God within all the circumstances of life. Here again, Mary was the model of such contemplative awareness. She who pondered all things in her heart, was the model and exemplar. Only through such a life of reflective listening, would one receive the gifts God had to offer. And it was necessary to receive. Mary Potter had come to understand that power of Motherhood. She wrote:

My God, I understand! A mother is one who receives to give. Thy spirit impresses me. I must bear fruit. I must give. I receive to give. May I be faithful to thy mission: “I have made thee mother. Remember thy office in my Church”. (A.N. Vol. 1., p. 95)

This was the office that the members of the society would hold as essential to their spirit. It would be the empowering force behind all they did. They were Mothers as Mary was Mother - Mothers to Christ's brothers and Sisters: They would work with the same heart that worked in Mary, the world would be their family:

Open the doors wide to receive wayfarers from the world. Mary has given her heart to her own Little Company they must act by its dictates. They must act with the most perfect form of human love, the mother's, with that mother-love raised to such a height as it was raised in Mary. (M.C.24, p.252)

Honouring the heart of the Mother of Jesus was to live by its desires and loves, to be so moulded into an image of Mary that the society would live as Mary lived, united in the heart of the Son. So important was this concept of honouring the heart of Mary by loving imitation that the first rule of the Institute said clearly:

“ The Sisters seek to be moulded by Mary, so as to become the perfect likeness of her Maternal heart, wishing for what it wishes. and conforming themselves to its spirit.” (Conferences on the Rule, 1893)

Why? Because we must ever recollect that we have to follow our vocation we must form ourselves on our rule, which tells us our special work and devotion is to honour, and to honour by imitation, our Lady as Mother. Not even especially as the Mother of Jesus, but more especially as the Mother of us, and we know the place where she was made our Mother - it was on Calvary. There are other orders devoted to other parts of our Lady's life.....(but) we have to honour her as Mother, and to turn to her sweet heart to discover its emanations, to love it and honour it, and to form our own upon it. What is the heart of a Mother - even an ordinary one? Ah, it is full of warm, unselfish love. Oh, the depths of a Mother's heart, it is generally acknowledged that there is no love like it. It will suffer all things, endure all things, hope all things...(Conferences “M” p.91)

To suffer all things, to endure all things, to hope all things! If this was the role of a mother, then it was the role of the Little Company of Mary. Founded on the love of the Heart of Mary which itself suffered all things and endured the unendurable, and maintained itself in hope that all manner of things shall be well, the member of the Little Company of Mary was to have the willingness to walk the earth with boundless faith, hope and love, and to pray without ceasing to the Father of all Mercies, that none might be lost. To be such a Mother to the world demanded fidelity to the interior life of the Spirit - that the Word might be heard in the world - fidelity also to the needs of the children of earth, that their sufferings might not destroy the truth of the hope that lay within them.

The love that motivated action in the members of the Little Company of Mary, was based upon the love that reigned in the heart of Mary:

What was this love of Mary? It was an ardent desire of the possession of, and of union with, the children of earth because they are the children of God, made to his image and likeness, and redeemed by the blood of her Son, with a persevering willingness to suffer all things rather than one should be lost. And this is the love, sweet mother, that thou wouldst that thy children should have. It is thy entreating prayer thou wouldst have them offer, the prayer that never ceased in the midst of thy daily occupations, the prayer of thy heart. We have to become what all Mary's own must be - mothers - and that not in a half-and-half kind of way. Oh, no. What can be worse than a cold-hearted, neglectful mother? Certainly, it would be better not to be one at all than to be a bad one. No! We will be devoted, generous mothers to all who need our care, whether for their souls or for their bodies. God be praised, He is good indeed. He will give us all the grace we need - as much, I might almost say, as we choose to take and we want grace. We need to have our hearts in union with Mary's heart. (L.H.M. p.18)

This imitation of the Maternal Heart was not an easy task, however. Those who had been called to follow in the Path of

Mary, and who had been called to a life of celibate loving, had given to God the desires of their human hearts. They had willingly forsaken the joys of human companionship and deep intimacy for the lonely road of the prophetic witness to a love that would give itself to all, in imitation of the Lover of humanity, the Christ.

But, the power and the hunger of the human heart for love - to love and be loved - is immense. To voluntarily chose a life of celibate loving is to chose a life of fundamental aloneness. To love God in spirit and truth, is to reach a point where all the images vanish and the soul is bound to the infinite darkness of the unknowable God, who reveals himself in the littleness of things, and in the graced moments of his being in time and place and history. Mary Potter found in the wonderful immensity of God a sense of her own fullness and emptiness. She could write:” I seem to have been with God creating...”, and in that moment, when she had found herself in the darkness of the creating womb of God, she had come to an understanding that this vast, creative, darkness, was the 'spirit of God' as it hovered over the waters, and was an expression of the mothering forth from God, of all created things.

In her contemplation of the Mary, the Mother of Jesus, Mary Potter had seen that Mary herself was the perfect human expression of one who was chosen to reflect the Motherhood of God. She saw that motherhood itself was a conception of God - an expression of God's own creative and creating power. We need, perhaps, to break apart our own conceptions of motherhood, to enter into the thought of the founder, that God is Mother, as much as Father, and the twin conceptions are essential to a real understanding of God's being. As God created humanity “in his own image and likeness”, so he created them male and female...each in that likeness. Mary Potter saw clearly that one of the functions of the Little Company of Mary, was to reveal that feminine dimension of God to the world. It was not a sugar coated femininity that was wanted, nor a sterile harshness, but rather a warm and generative power that resembled the 'mother love of the good shepherd':

You must be true mothers Mothers by suffering, even unto death. Offer your life to give birth to children, in the spirit of the Mother-like Shepherd, who tells us: “I lay down my life for my sheep.”(M.C. 1., p.19)

Being a 'Mother after Mary's heart' was therefore inseparable from being a 'spouse of Jesus Crucified'. Jesus had shown that to give birth to souls, a death was necessary. For the member of the Little Company of Mary, that was equally true. They were to be mothers to the world in spirit and truth, with their whole being dedicated to the birthing of Christ in the hearts of humanity. Yet, here too, she reflects the practicality of her gift. To be a true Mother, there are attitudes of mind and heart that must be carefully nourished and brought into being in the members of this Little Company. There is a learning process to be undergone - or perhaps, it is better called an unlearning, for the characteristic of the Christ-like Mother, was one of abandonment to the will of the Father, and that characteristic was not something that was easy for the children of earth. It required a heroic giving of self, again an abandonment, that would lead to the willing eradication of everything that was not of Jesus, in our hearts, our souls:

Mary is the Mother above all Mothers, Mary is the model of motherhood and we cannot be like our Mother Mary, unless we too have mother's hearts. If we keep close in her company, if we lean upon her and trust in her, if we ask her to show the love of her sweet maternal heart, we shall gradually grow like, it, we shall imbibe its spirit such a beautiful spirit it is, such a lovable one. Little by little, we shall feel it growing within us the change may be

imperceptible at first, but there will come by degrees a new feeling, a maternal feeling, new to us, superseding our old feeling of self love, and what is better than any feeling at all - inducing us to greater things for the good of others.

We may perhaps have had a sister's love, we may have had an apostolic love of souls, we may have longed to do good to others, yet this love was quite a different thing from the new love we find our Mother putting into our hearts this mother love for others and this mother love is such a passion, that our hearts seem different ones from what they were. We hardly know them now. (LHM. p.18)

This was the perfection that Mary Potter wanted to see brought to birth in the hearts of her sisters. It was the graced being - the human heart of those specially chosen for the task - doing and being what they were born to be and do. It was a specialised ministry - a specialised way of being in the Church. The characteristic of maternal care for the world was the special cast of the institute. The call was to "be" the expression of this Mother love to the world. The Virgin Mother of Christ was its perfect expression. The members of the Little Company would be the echoes of that love:

This is the perfection we children of the Maternal Heart are to aim at. It will bring such graces upon the world when Jesus can look down and see this Mother-love of Mary spread over the world in every country. The pleadings of a mother will be everascending before God, that beautiful unselfish cry of a true mother we shall, hidden in our Mother's heart, send up the pure incense of prayer from our unselfish hearts, a loving maternal feeling for those around will induce a constant cry for mercy for them, and mercy will come. God's mercy will be ever descending as the maternal prayer of Mary's heart is sent from earth to heaven by Mary's children on earth the hopeful, imploring, loving cry will be most pleasing to God, and his benediction will certainly come from heaven to earth upon those poor erring ones from whom it is thus implored, and a double benediction likewise for those who ask and who plead, as if for their own salvation, and who thus fulfil our Lord's command, by loving others as He has loved them. (LHM p.19).

This was a call to radical commitment - there was no time but this time - there was no place but this place (wherever this place was), to plead for those who needed our prayers, and mother-presence. There was only the 'now' of each person's life to act and love without ceasing:

Need I point out again, (Mary wrote), that whether sick or well your place is at the gates of Holy Church, that no soul should pass through those portals of time into Eternity for whom we have not prayed All have this same work, whether we are in the kitchen or in the laundry, or in the sick room or on a sick bed ourselves. We must still keep to our post. The post that holy Church has assigned us, that we may help the poor dying. We must be as sentinels, faithful to death." (Conferences on the Rule, p.89, Conferences "M")

This conceptualisation of the mother-love of Jesus and Mary being expressed in the world of time and eternity was an important one for Mary Potter, but it was likewise full of practicalities. It was not a vague ideal, or mushy sentimentality - it was a way of life, a life that was livable and totally human:

My principal object is simply to draw your attention, to examine yourselves (on) how much your own hearts

resemble mothers' hearts. Much more - how do they resemble the Mother heart of Mary? Take each point - and principally the point of love - that self-sacrificing, generous, patient, hopeful love that a good mother possesses, and then, looking upon our Mother Mary, see how this love extends to all mankind. How much we shall find to fill us with confusion! How we shall find that we never considered this our daily work for souls. Have we worked with the love of a mother, with the patience of a mother, with the hope of a mother? Ah, it is here we give up. A mother ever hopes, and we, how soon we give up and lose our hope. If we hoped more, how much we should do. Consider the Canaanite mother, how she hoped and persevered in her request, even though our Lord seemed to repel her - so must we hope and persevere and then much good shall we do. (Conferences "M" p. 91)

The boundless hope and love that was to be the characteristic of the member of the Little Company of Mary, would lead them into many forms of loving service. There would be no one need that the mother-heart of the members would not, could not meet. Love was the key to all action - the maternal, nurturing care of those 'motherless' ones in the world, but still more, this love and hope would also determine the manner of community life and loving that should predominate amongst the members themselves:

Our spirit is the highest form of love known among men, a mother's love. The beautiful conception of God that he created in this world, and which is more like himself than anything else in the world. How carefully should we guard this treasure God has given us.....

We have to bring forth fruit after our kind, and what we are to do is to show a mother love - a maternal care - to all around, first in the convent, and then outside it.....and if we tamper with this, (it is so God-like, the most beautiful thing on earth), should we not indeed do an evil and bitter thing. (Conferences "M", p. 96)

This mother-love was to be extended to each other. The members of the institute were to be mothers to each other' in spirit and in truth. There was to be no harshness, no cruelty in the Little Company. There was to be the awareness of the need for all to grow and become the strong, true women they had been called to be. To inflict suffering on those who were companions on the journey was to betray the trust given by God to the institute. Mary Potter had known ill treatment herself, and whilst she herself could be hard, she was never unloving. She wrote to her followers:

Reliable and trustworthy sisters will not be formed by being threatened and stormed at. We can be led to love to do our works, to lead noble lives for love of God, but we cannot be forced to it.....

Another thing - those who are constantly reproached in a hard manner are not raised to respect themselves and their state, and a great many of our sisters need raising and refining. They may have been threatened in the world, and have acquired a habit ...of working for the eye of man to see. How can they be stripped of this, which is so necessary, and taught to live in another atmosphere - a fresh groove of thought implanted in their minds - if they are treated in this worldly way? If we want to raise them to a higher range of thought, and let them be inspired with the great idea of their dignity as spouse of Jesus, that they may strive to keep up to that dignity, show them great respect, which any tone bordering on contempt would be likely to injure. (Conferences "M" p.96)

To be a mother in truth, was nothing more than being an agent of love and mercy, as Jesus and Mary had been agents of love and mercy to the world. For Mary Potter, this mother-love was the foundation of the works and the spirit of the

Little Company. Motherhood was not a human inspiration, nor simply a biological function. It was a real expression of God - a dimension of the power of God a human realisation of the the divine, creative act of God. The Mother of Jesus had given birth, through the action of the spirit of God - that same creative Spirit that had brooded over the waters of the void, before the world was. Jesus had given birth to the Church in pain and anguish on Calvary by the power of that same Spirit, and the members of the Little Company, by their voluntary uniting of themselves, to the way of abandonment that was the path of Jesus and Mary, would themselves, bring to birth, by the power of the Spirit, the Christ life. They would be mothers also. By uniting themselves to the Cross of Christ they would enter into the joy of bringing to birth the fullness of Christ, in themselves, in the world, and in all people. Their lives and spirit, their relationships with each other and the world, were to be modelled on the conception of motherhood that existed in God. Mary Potter wrote: Let all remember that their special rule binds them to a particular maternity - an exemplification of this beautiful conception of God's mind. (ibid). To be mothers after Mary's heart, and in the image of Jesus, however, the members of the institute would have to be bound to the Spirit of God, as Jesus and Mary were. They were called to be open to the Spirit in a particular way, that their call to Motherhood and Mercy may be accomplished in the world.

Born of the Spirit [+Back](#)

If the members of the Little Company of Mary were to live according to the demands of their vocation, Mary Potter knew well that, they must be open to the movements of the Spirit of God within their own souls, and within the world as Jesus and Mary had been. The entire vocation of those who had been called to the Little Company was dependent upon their being open to it. In order to receive the Spirit, however, the soul needs to rid itself of everything that would block its action:

If we give up ourselves, we receive God's self. When we give up our own will and way, our own spirit, to walk according to God's will and his way, we receive his Spirit. Precious, happy exchange, every part of ourselves emptied, subdued, is filled with God. (S E, p.17., USA Ed.)

Here again the member of the Little Company is thrust back into the one reality - that it is only in proportion to the willingness to give up self, that grace, the Spirit of God, is received. For Mary Potter, the spiritually alive person was the one who lived humbly and simply, waiting on God. This was the essential meaning of liberty of spirit, the essential 'being in God', that is holiness itself.

Mary Potter understood, however, that the Holy Spirit does not 'breathe easily in softness' (Conference of Whitsuntide - Unpublished Conference N.) To receive the Holy Spirit, the soul must be mortified - must be constantly seeking to deny itself, that the Spirit may enter. However, the paradox remained true, that the soul cannot subdue the self that seeks to dominate, without the action of the Spirit. In a particular sense, it is the Spirit of God itself which seeks to subdue the violence of sin in the soul, because it lives within the soul, within the nature of beings, made in the image of likeness of God. For Mary Potter, the indwelling nature of the Spirit was joy and glory, but it had to be let free:

The holy Spirit is in all who are longing , who labour in harmony with their longings, for we all know that to long

to be a good musician, a good painter, or anything else, would be fruitless if we practise not the art we would be master of. Then we, who aim at putting off the old man and putting on the new, namely living a life of union with Jesus, putting on his virtues, becoming God-like - we must use strenuous efforts to keep to our high resolutions. (op. cit., p.101)

Like the spiritual masters of old, Mary Potter was convinced of the need for mortification in the lives of those who were called to the Little Company. They could not be truly bound to Jesus without mortification they could not be willing victims without penance they could not understand the reality of the grace given to them, unless they first came to understand that of themselves, they were nothing...but in God, they indeed were everything. For Mary Potter, the wonderful gift of the Spirit in her own spiritual life had led her to an understanding of what the Holy Spirit was:

Do we realise what the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity is? That Spirit of love, proceeding from the Father and Son, yet - equal to both! We speak of the spirit of certain saints - the spirit of the sweet St. Francis De Sales, of the great St. Ignatius - the spirit of these saints means to us, as it were, their essence, their manifestation. So it is, in a higher sense, with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God. (op. cit., p.34 A retreat on the Holy Spirit).

This awareness of the Spirit as the action of Love within the Trinity of God should be a natural reality to the members of the Little Company, for their very orientation was to live the life of that Trinity, given us in Baptism. The Little Company, according to the design of the Founder, was based upon the conscious living out of that Baptismal consecration - a life that was caught up in the wonderful rhythms of the Trinitarian life. In that life, the soul is living within God the creator God the One who holds us close to his heart God, the complete and wonderful Lover. If the sister of the Little Company was to live according to her vocation as a Christian, and as Spouse, then she was called to enter into the mystery of that Triune life, and to be responsive to it. She was called to understand that it is God the Father who forms us, moulds us, shapes and longs for us that it is Christ, the Son, who holds, cherishes, and saves and that it is the Spirit of both of these, who expresses the love of the Father to us, who brings us into the life of the Son, and who touches our hearts to renew us, constantly in that Trinitarian life:

Dear Sisters, think again: our own perfection consists in realising what we know. We repeated as children - God the Father made me God the Son redeemed me God the Holy Spirit sanctified me...The work of God's spirit.. is to make us saints! (Conferences "A", No.31, p.53)

Love for the spirit of God, for Mary Potter, came from her understanding of the wonder of the Incarnation and Redemption. Mary, the Mother of Jesus had been invaded by Love - impregnated by the Spirit of Love, and in her love response, had conceived Jesus - God made man. This was endless wonder and awe for Mary: God had become flesh, that poor human beings may know their own glory in him. The Virgin Mary had become Mother by the power of the Spirit. That Spirit was able to enter into her because there was nothing in her to block that entry no concern for self, no desire for anything else but God's will being achieved in her:

The Third Person of the Blessed Trinity manifested himself to us in that magnificent work of God, the Incarnation. His indwelling within, and overshadowing of our Blessed Lady produced the Incarnate Word. In her pure heart

there was nothing that could be an obstacle to the action of God's spirit, and through the Holy Spirit, the Immaculate Virgin became the Mother, not only of the Incarnate Son, but also of all that vast family which he has given her. And in her prompt response to her Spouse, the Holy Spirit, she is our model, as she is in everything. (Conference on the Holy Spirit. Conferences "N" p.134)

This was the supreme joy! In the Incarnation, Mary Potter saw the reality of the spiritual life. As Mary had enfleshed Christ by the power of the Spirit, so, from that time forward, all those who called themselves Christians were destined to conceive the Christ. The grace and the power of Baptism brought the Spirit to the soul. The grace and the power of Confirmation brought added strength and aid. What the soul was called to do, was to respond. For those who entered the Little Company, and indeed for all those who were called to the Christian life, this was the task:- To become pregnant with the Word of God, and to nurture that Christ life to its fulfilment within themselves and within each other. This was Motherhood in Christ. This was being a real Spouse of Christ - wedded to him in the intimacy of union. This was to come to know and find oneself in the immensity of the Triune life of God. This wonderful yet awesome delight to which the Christian is called - (to live in, with, for God) - is rather more complex for us to achieve, borne as we are without Mary's fullness of grace! To reach the being-in-God, that we are called to, there is a necessary self-emptying to be undergone. Mary Potter understood the need we all have, to subdue the self that would obstruct such intimacy:

The pure still atmosphere of God's presence needs us to keep in it - that we should keep away all foreign spirits - self, the world, and be attentive to God's spirit. God's voice, which is passing sweet to the attentive soul, to the listening one who waits humbly in the presence of its God, longing for the moment he will speak.(ON Vol.4., p.8)

To be receptive to the Word - to be fertile to the creating power of the Spirit, there was a certain awareness, a certain longing, a certain docility that was necessary. All these attributes were the attributes of the Mother of the Lord. She was the spouse of the Holy Spirit, she was the one who waited, the one who opened herself to receive: she was the one who would form her children into women who were, like her, bound to their God by the action of his Spirit of Love. If the members of the Little Company would permit themselves to be formed in the pattern of Mary, then the Spirit would come:

God, looking upon this world, will again bless it, and the Holy Spirit be attracted, drawn to those souls who are echoing the melody that Mary's soul made to God. As often as we renew our promises, our vows, so often do we give fresh gifts to God. (O.N. Vol 3., p. 27)

The member of the Little Company had to be prepared for this invasion by God's spirit. It was part and parcel of her vocation to the Cross, her vocation to be Mercy to the world, and her vocation as Mother to the world. Without the power and the grace of the Spirit acting within her, the member of the Little Company would lose the core of her being. The sufferings, the contradictions, the pain of her commitment would have no joy, no blessedness without this union with the Spirit. Mary Potter claimed the right of those who were called to this Company, to be possessed by the Spirit. If they were to love the world as Christ had loved it, as Mary loved it, the gifts of the Spirit were necessary. Openness to those gifts had to be unconditional:

Inflame me anew. Breathe into me, O my God, of thy spirit, that I may commence anew. Let my youth be

renewed, O my God. Give strength to my soul, that I may never relax, but persevere with ever increasing love, labouring at Thy work, O my God, in the spirit Thou wouldst have me (have) - not slavishly, but generously, willingly, using all my powers of mind, of memory, of understanding, loving Thee, my God, in all I do. Loving Thee in Thine, in those around me. Waiting on, working for all, especially those who are given to my care - the sick, the poor, the suffering. (O.N. Vol. 4., p. 9)

But to be bound to the Spirit meant that the soul had to know itself in truthfulness - it must know its own poverty of being, its own need of Mercy and salvation. To know that, is to be again 'poor in spirit', and only then can the Spirit truly come alive in the heart. In her own journey to God, Mary Potter had experienced the indwelling of the Spirit - she had come to understand that the one thing necessary for the individual was that God's will be done in them. If the Sister of the Little Company of Mary was to be true to her calling to be truly united with Jesus, then discernment was necessary. The question had to be constantly asked. "What do you ask of me, my God"? To live the life of a member of the Little Company, was to live in the awareness that God speaks to his people, gives them his grace, that his work may be done in the world. To neglect the graces thus offered, would be to deny the very vocation of Calvary, where God's will was done in all its agony, and all its beauty. The member of the Little Company had to constantly enter into her act of abandonment to all that was not of God, and to enter into it, in the power of the Spirit. In a beautiful passage to her sisters in religion, Mary Potter wrote of the need to be ever in tune with the touch of that Spirit:

My heart is yours my God, touch it with your Divine finger. May it respond ever in accord. May my heart be an instrument ever ready for thee my God, to touch at pleasure, and produce from it, in thy exceeding condescension, music which - even from such a poor instrument, found in a fallen world - is still pleasing to thee, (though) varying must be the strains. Now the sound shall resound to thy ordinance, by thy sweet will, the sound shall rise from earth to heaven, of hope. (A.N. Vol 1., p.37)

A similar thought had been expressed by Augustine, in his Confessions, when he said: "O Lord, you laid your most gentle, most merciful finger upon my heart and set my thoughts in order" (Confessions: VI:5). To be touched by the 'finger of God' - the loving spirit of God - is to be brought into a consciousness of our own folly - our own stupidity, and our own culpability. Mary Potter understood clearly, and sought to inculcate in her sisters, the reality of their commitment. They too, had to allow themselves to be touched by the finger of God - to be made aware of the reality of sin in their lives, and of the wonder of Mercy. Again there is the paradox of blessedness. God lives within our weakness, and constantly seeks to bring us to our strength in him. Our strength is to become aware of our weakness, so that we live in constant contrition of heart - in a constant state of conversion. We are called to contrition and penance as naturally as we are called to grace and holiness. They are the same thing.

To be touched by the Spirit is to be aware and open to respond to the intimacy of love - love of God and love of neighbour. But love demands sacrifice, and further entry into love. To be touched by the Spirit is to be made aware - on deeper and deeper levels - of the poverty and sinfulness of the human condition. The demands of love impel the soul to seek to make reparation for its own sins and the sins of the world. And, as the soul is led to its own littleness, it is also led into a real humility and responsive love. As it comes to understand its own weakness, it comes to an understanding of the weakness of the other, thereby leading it to compassion:

..Do not condemn the world...Hate the sins that are committed in it. Look fixedly and long on the perpetrators of crime. You turn away with a shudder from a degraded woman, a tipsy man, a murderer. They are, however, of the same flesh and blood as you. One touch of nature makes the whole world kin. You may be like them. You may be surprised into greater sins, if you fight not with the lesser ones - but fight! (AN Vol.4., p. 24)

Compassion would also lead the sister of the Little Company to understand the beautiful nature of the world. It would impel her to act within it. Mary Potter understood how little the world was, how fragile, yet how much loved! We are called to see the world with the same eyes:

We children of Mary, if we would be like our Mother, how must we love the world so loved by God? The author of the world dwelt within her. The world's history lay clear before her. ...Let us look out upon the world...(and).. view the world with our Mother. She seemed to hold it within her. Her colossal mind saw at once how little was the world, and, at the same time, how great. A world so loved by God. (AN Vol., 4, p. 24)

Only the mind alive in the Spirit can understand the wonderful compassion of a God, who maintains such a little thing as the world because of love. Only one who is gifted with the insight, that they too only exist because of that love, can respond with a full heart, and with joy.

For Mary Potter, compassion was the companion of love, which was the pre-eminent gift of the Spirit. Compassion expresses the love that lies within. It is unbridled, outreaching, stretching beyond the margins of human respect or personal pride. It is the gift of a heart that aches with the knowledge of its own limitations, yet burns with passionate desire that all may know their giftedness, their own love-ability. For Mary Potter, that compassionate, all encompassing love was the true sign of the Spirit living in the individual and in the community. She wrote:

He is waiting, our Lord and Life and Love, with outstretched arms to receive us. We will not stay on the road, nor think of rest, but hurry on the way. It is the one way we have of showing our Love to Jesus, helping and encouraging others and yet, our selfish trials sometimes hinder us from doing this one work, loving others not in word only, but in deed, and by loving others, not only those whom we go out to assist, those outside the convent, but we mean, first and foremost our own sisters. I mean not to make light words, but beside kind, loving words, we must have kind loving acts, and the law of charity obliges us to give them first at home, and then to externs.... (Retreat of the Holy Spirit, Conferences "N" p.105)

Love of each other, love of all those to whom the Little Company was called to serve, was the barometer for Mary Potter, of the life of the Spirit acting within the congregation. Whilst the Spirit might breathe where he will, Mary's Little Company was to draw that Spirit down upon itself, by the pure lives that were led within it. If the congregation was truly living according to Mary's heart, then the Spirit of God could not help being attracted to it:

When we reflect, possess, God-like virtues, when our hearts are full of love, resignation, kind in thought etc., - we attract God. There is much to think of in this. Without our asking God to come, he is himself attracted. He is drawn to us. He gravitates - as a mother draws a child to herself and longs, loves to embrace her offspring, so our God loves his children, draws them, and draws them to himself. (AN Vol. 4., p. 23)

In real terms, what Mary Potter sought to place before the members of the Little Company was the reality of God praying within, living within, loving within. Her own conception of the truth of the Christ life in each individual soul - that life which was begun in Baptism - brought her to understand the fact that we do not pray - God prays in us. In a particular sense, we cannot pray - we cannot attract God, it is God within us who adores, prays, loves. The member of the Little Company of Mary was to express this reality to the world, as Mary, the Mother of Jesus had done. For, this was the case with the Mother of Jesus. Her purity of heart and soul and mind 'drew down' the blessedness of the Son, and God's mercy broke upon the world in the person of Jesus. If the Sister of the Little Company of Mary would but model herself upon her Mother in Christ, Mary herself would teach her how to be 'a magnet' - drawing down the waiting Spirit of God. As Mary Potter wrote to her companions:

“God, looking upon this world, will again bless it, and the Holy Spirit will be attracted, drawn to those souls who are echoing that melody that Mary's soul made to God. (AN Vol.3.p27)

As the pure melody of Mary's heart had drawn down the Spirit of God, and thus co-operated in the wonder of the Incarnation - the blessing of Mercy poured upon the world, and, as Jesus' heart had sung strong and true, of the love he had for his Father and his people, and had thus drawn the Spirit to the world of men, so would the sister of the Little Company seek to divest herself of all that was not of God, that the Spirit of God might ever fall upon the earth, bringing with it grace and blessing for those in need.

To be spouse of the Spirit was to be in tune with the master singer, as the Mother of Jesus had been, from the moment of annunciation to the moment of resurrection and beyond. Only by being filled by the spirit, could the life of suffering and penance be truly lived. Only then could the vocation of the sister of the Little Company of Mary, to be Mercy, be Mother, come to its fulfilment

In the final analysis, for Mary Potter, if the member of the Little Company was to live her life, true to her calling to be one in and with the heart of Mary, bound to Christ through the Cross, then it was of paramount importance that she listen to the voice of the Spirit in all the occurrences of her life. Only in that way could the will of God be fulfilled. Only in that correspondence to the touchings of grace, could the soul be brought into union with its beloved Lord:

What graces will not this devotion bring with it untold will be the graces that devotion to the Holy Spirit will bring us, graces incredible to those who have not this love for God's love, the beautiful spirit of God, by whom, if we live we shall be indeed not of this earth, earthy, but though on earth, we shall have our souls in heaven. Yes, heaven is already begun in the souls of those who live by God's spirit, who have opened their hearts to receive him, who have received, by means of God's fair fountain, our dear Mother Mary, the holy Spirit into their souls, with such love and devotion, with such renunciation of their own selves, their own spirits, that they are indeed living temples of God, and the holy Spirit dwells in them with love untold. (It) penetrates their human nature, filling it with the priceless gifts of God - charity, joy, peace, patience. These are God's gifts, even whilst we are on earth: joy, peace, content, happiness. Those who have joy on this earth, those who have peace, are wrapt in the embraces of the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, the beautiful spirit of God. (O.L.R. p. 93)

To such as those who live within the embraces of the Trinity, by being open to the Spirit, is given the taste of heaven on earth. They receive and know, as the Mother of Jesus knew, the infinite joy of the Annunciation....God lives in them. They, like their Mother Mary, seek to share the gift. They, like her, are called to tell of the wonders of the Lord, to sing their Magnificat of wonder and awe, at the mighty things God has done for them. Like Mary also, they will be called to look carefully at the gift, knowing that it is not for them alone, but for the glory of God in the world in which they live. Mary Potter understood this quite clearly. There was one task - to make the world one in Christ. As the members of the Little Company were filled by the Spirit, they were called to discern the needs of the world - to go and sing their understand. In this too, the model was the Mother of Jesus. She had carried the Word to Elizabeth. The Little Company would be called to 'carry the Word to the world' - the world of their own community, the world in which that community lived. In order to be effective in that, however, there was a need to develop the spiritual centre of the society.

Women of Eucharist [Back](#)

If the member of the Little Company was to be the bearer of the good news of Jesus to the world, it was imperative that each member of the community understood her relationship to the Word of God revealed in the Eucharist. For Mary Potter, the ultimate point of that relationship was her sense of being bound to Eucharist....bound to the power of Christ in the wonder of his sacrament of love. Only by such a centering, could the spiritual life of the individual and the community be realised, for within that reality, there lay a further truth regarding the nature of the vocation of the member of the Little Company.

Firstly, in the presence of Christ in the sacrament, lay the necessary 'food for the journey' that was to be undertaken:

Not mere sentiment should prompt your love for the Blessed Sacrament. You need this strengthening food, if you would be firm and walk faithfully in the steps of Jesus to Calvary.Refresh your spirits and strengthen your soul every hour of the day with spiritual communion that will make you yearn for the holy hour in which he will come to you.Our whole body and soul, our very life depends on the Blessed Sacrament we must be penetrated with its virtue. It must live in us, we must exist for it (B.C, p.3 USA ed.).

But more than being simply bread for the journey, Eucharist was a way of living life. To live such a life meant to embrace the cross again and again to live in spirit and truth, the oblation that Eucharist calls forth from the individual soul. If the member of the Little Company was to live a life such as Jesus and Mary had lived, then it was imperative that there be an understanding within the heart of each member, that "we need to know our Lord in the breaking of the bread."(B.C., p.2).

To know Jesus in the breaking of the Bread, was the same for Mary Potter, as it had been for the disciples on the way to Emmaus - it was the kind of knowing that opened the eyes of faith, enabling those who would be disciples to race back to their communities, their people, to tell them of the good news of Jesus risen and glorified, and living again in the hearts and minds of his followers. The power of the sacramental life, was the power of the Lord of all things: the power of God himself who sought to transform, liberate, enliven, the heart of the members of the Institute, the Institute itself, and the apostolate to which they had been called. Mary wrote:

We cannot be nuns, we cannot live the life of Jesus, unless he himself supports us, and holds us in his arms. We shall fail, we shall fall, we shall become dry without him. I am smitten as grass and my heart is withered, for I have forgotten to eat my bread. Yes, well impressed with this thought, we shall wisely walk in the desert, ever leaning on our Beloved.(B.C., p.6)

In the Eucharist, Mary Potter found the source to maintain the gifts she had been given. In the Eucharist, she saw the enabling of all those who followed her, the sustenance for the hard - yet tender life - to which they had been called. As the members of the institute had been chosen to take their place upon Calvary - to live a Calvary life, so too had they been called to live the reality of that life, by being bread for the hungry, wine for the thirsty, even unto death. The nature of the vocation of the Little Company was pure Gospel. Jesus had said: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all things to myself", and the Cross of Christ is the drawing power of the Church and all who would be part of that Church. For the members of the Little Company of Mary, however, it held a particular relevance. which Mary Potter expressed thus:

Thou hast drawn us dear Jesus, and we have come to live with Thee upon the Cross to be moulded into a work of thy Holy Spirit to be known as Spouses of Jesus Crucified but oh, sweet Jesus, we must first be spouses of thine in thy Sacrament of Love, before we lean upon your breast with your beloved disciple, and hear the pulsations of your sacred heart! Oh dear Jesus, we need to be thus drawn closely to thee, if we would live with thee upon the Cross, and feel those other beatings of thy crushed heart, as they come and go with intermittent throbs in thy death agony.(B.C., p.7)

To thus rest on the breast of Jesus in communion, is not to simply to abandon oneself to the delights of the Lord - it is also to hear, in the intimate moments of union with the Lord - and in communion with him - the cry of the poor, the hungry, the impoverished, the sinner, the lost and the lonely - as Jesus hears and responds to them. To seek for the spiritual satisfaction of union with God for oneself alone, is antipathetic to the vocation to which the Christian, and more intensely, the member of the Little Company has been called. Mary wrote strongly about such spiritual sensuality:

He...looks upon the souls whom he has enriched with graces that they may help him, that they may go in his place in search of the lost sheep and so many are deaf to his whisper, so many are rejoicing in the graces, the gifts he has given them, (that they) forget the naked and hungry and sick souls they could help if they stretched out their hands to them. Many are too happy, too warm and comfortable in their devotion (M.Cl. p.2)

Only if the soul can break itself open to the truth of the graces that God gives, can the world be made anew in Christ. To be broken, however, is not enough. Humility and love need to be born within the soul, and that, the soul itself cannot achieve. A grace and aid is needed. If the member of the Little Company is called to live as Eucharist for the world - that is as celebration, as sacrifice, as food for the people of God, they are first called to live poor and humble, constantly ready to call upon the help of the Lord - to be vitalised by his presence, to be challenged to courage and hope.

For Mary Potter, the reality of the sacramental life of the Church was the place where such strength, such faith, such courage could be attained and strengthened.

There is one lesson that should be learned today, tomorrow and every day, for only by having it strongly imprinted upon our minds, and putting it into practice, will we advance spiritually. It is the constant going to our dear Lord when we feel needy and poor and taking help from him by means of the sacraments received, really or spiritually. We can receive Communion but once a day in reality, but any number of times during the day will our dear Lord spiritually raise his hand in pardon, absolution, benediction over us many times will he clasp us to his heart and feed us with his most Precious Blood - if we but ask him.(B.C. p.10)

What was to be understood, was that the power of the Eucharist was always present. It was in fact, the radiating heart of the universe the expression of the longing love of God, which waits for his people to turn to him, to receive him - actually and spiritually. The reality of the Eucharistic life of the member of the Little Company was that she was able to see and know that power, and to be an agent of its love and mercy in the world, by her own willingness to be consumed with the fire of love:

It is well for us to know that our whole strength, our whole life is in Jesus, and derived from him. Let us learn our lesson well, and never need another to prove to us where our strength lies. With St. Paul, let us say, "I can do all things in him who strengthens me". With this motto sunk deeply into our souls, we shall conquer all difficulties, we shall fight the good fight well, and strive with the world, the flesh and the devil, not only for ourselves, but for others. We shall then be fruitful spouses of Jesus we shall give him children we shall conquer even hardened souls by the grace that he will give us, because we shall know so well that it is not ourselves but Jesus who conquers in us.....

No pain should be, and no pain shall be too great to do our work for our Lord, and to bring him children for whom he died. For this will we labour in our souls, sparing no pains. (B.C., p. 11)

To meet Christ in the Eucharist, and to be transformed by the encounter, requires co-operation. Mary Potter understood that the greatness of 'being Eucharist' had as its constant cost, yet another level of abandonment. To truly meet Christ in the Eucharist, the individual has to be small - to be little enough to receive of the fullness of Christ who 'emptied himself', who made himself into a small piece of bread and a little wine: "For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I in him." (Jn 6: 55-56). If the member of the Little Company was to truly embrace the Eucharistic life, then she too had to enter into the smallness of a God, who "has put himself into our hands. He, our dear Lord, is dependent upon us." (L.H.M. P.37) but, "only the humble of heart receive the grace of God. The grace of Jesus is poured into them". (B.C. p.9) To be eucharist is to be little with the littleness of those who know that only God can empower and change to be eucharist is to embrace with joy, the pain and the suffering, that genuine Christian love will entail:

The spouse of Incarnate love must be all love, and, advance as we may in the queen of virtues, charity, still we have little idea how far we are from its perfection.charity is not simply patience, benevolence, generosity it is a real turning of the heart to a loved one, and the giving all possible good to the object beloved. Charity is union of heart and soul with the object beloved, and this charity, when perfected as it will be in heaven, makes us rejoice in another's happiness as though it were our own. (B.C. p.13)

To give of oneself in such a manner was, for Mary Potter, the determiner of the manner of life of the member of the Little Company. To be a woman of Eucharist meant to be inflamed with the idea that in Eucharist, Jesus gifts us with himself, with his real and absolute presence. There is total unity between the Giver and the Gift. If the member of the Little Company was to live her vocation to its fullness, there could be no separation between her giving and the gift she offered to her God, her community, her world. The command of Jesus at the Last Supper was “do this in memory of me”. That was the realisation of the life of the disciple, and in a real sense, the realisation of the vocation of the member of the Little Company. Each member had to come to her own understanding of the truth that God had called her, and had, in his own way said:

Go, and do this.....in memory of, and in union with Me. Go! Sacrifice yourself on the altar of my love, that others may live: Go! Be willing victims, that others may live to come to know Me: Go! Preach My name to all nations, and care for the little ones of the kingdom, with the mother-love of the Good Shepherd:
Go! Feed my lambs and my sheep: Go! Bring Mercy to the most piteous - and suffer yourself not to be separated from Me by living within the heart of My Mother! To live such a life, however, requires strength, and the strength was there in the Sacrament of Love: “The spouse of Jesus must live by the grace and strength of the Blessed Sacrament.” (B.C. p.7)

For Mary Potter, her own identity, and the identity of all the members of the Little Company was found in the central message of the Eucharist. It was on Calvary that Christ had made himself a willing victim that all people may come to know the wonderful Mercy of God poured out in love for all mankind. Calvary was the beginning and the end of all the searching, all the questing of the human heart. Calvary was - even in its brutality - the place the only place of Truth and Beauty and Love.

If the member of the Little Company of Mary was to be true to her 'Calvary' vocation as spouse of Jesus Crucified, and was to live the reality of the motherhood to which she had been called, in the mystery of the Spirit, then the Eucharist was the place of understanding. In the sacrament the reality of what had been done in time and place and history, was held and continued: Jesus had said: “No one takes my life from me I lay it down of my own free will” (Jn.10:18). The free self-emptying of Christ, was the model of the free self-emptying of the member of the Little Company of Mary - the reason for her entry into the Path of Mary, the reason for her vows to God, the reason for her ministry.

Christ's victory over death, however, was won in one blinding moment of dying and rising. The human cast of the followers of Jesus demanded that the moment be won again and again, through an ever deepening renunciation of all that is not of God - and that can only be achieved, by a constant awareness of our personal powerlessness which can be transformed into power, only if we let God be God to us - to permit him to reign in our hearts and minds, as Mary, the Mother of the Lord had done:

Let us turn to the Mother of our holy Faith the Virgin proclaimed blessed because she believed. We know our faith is weak, but let us use the faith of the Mother most faithful. Let us ask her to offer for us her heart of faith. In all the acts in which we know we have been so wanting hitherto, let us offer to Jesus his mother's virtues to supply for us. The faith and hope of the Mother of Jesus will be in her children if they humbly ask her to supply for their

deficiencies. We will ask our holy Mother to strengthen our faith now, today and tomorrow, this month and next. We will, likewise, ask Jesus to regard not us, but to see his Mother in us, and for her dear sake to supply our deficiencies, and bless us and our works.Remember sisters, you are not powerless, but most powerful, if you work with faith. So we will work and living by faith and hope, we will die, please God, Victims of love. (B.C. p.29)

To enter into the mystery of Eucharist with the dispositions of the Mother of God meant to enter into a realisation of our own inability to welcome the Lord of our hearts as he should be welcomed. It is to humbly accept our innate poverty and lack of understanding of the reality that God is. It is also to humbly recognise the mystery that is Eucharist itself. Through contemplating the mystery of Eucharist by uniting themselves to it by offering all that they have and are within it the member of the Little Company is brought to Love's own end - union of heart and mind and will. It is to find oneself in the heart of God, and to know oneself as nothing more than a being, willed by God into existence, to serve him as He serves us - with warmth and tenderness and adoring love:

Let us go into the presence of our dear Lord, and there, kneeling and adoring, thank him for his great love and condescension to us.....He longs to begin on earth that union for which he made us, which will be consummated in heaven. It seems as though it were too long for him to wait our death. Let us but prepare a place for him in our hearts, and he will come and abide there, for so he promises....."If any one love me, my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him." Yes, Jesus has already made his abode with us we have him on our altars.....but a far more pleasing abode indeed, is the human heart to Jesus, than the tabernacle of our altars. Those are happy souls who ever keep Jesus with them, taking his delight in them and filling them with the peace and joy that must ever accompany his holy presence." (L.H.M. p. 39)

If, through the celebration of Eucharist, the union of grace grows strong and true, then the member of the Little Company is transformed by it, into an expression of Christ himself, and the works, the ministries of the individual are themselves transformed into the works and the ministry of Jesus acting through us. Mary Potter understood, like the great Teresa before her, that Jesus now has no hands, feet, heart, with which to love and serve the world, than ours. It is we who are called to be food for the hungry, wine for the thirsty. But only by living Eucharist, can we become living eucharist to the world. That is the challenge and the response demanded, which cuts across all self love and purifies actions.

In a specific and wonderful way, to accept to be eucharist, is to reaffirm the call to be "mother" in the same way as Jesus was and is 'Mother' to his people. Mary Potter constantly returned to this theme - this theological insight. Her hopes for her congregation lay in the understanding of the calling to be maternal in the sense that Jesus himself was maternal: His gifts and graces come to us tenderly and simply, in the homely way of bread and wine, and gentle hospitality. Even as he is Lord of the Universe, Maker of all things, he is the Mother who brought us forth on Calvary, and who nourishes us on his very flesh in Eucharist. For Mary Potter, the lesson lay clear. The vocation of the sister of the Little Company was to do the same for others. In the Motherhood of the Son, as well as in the Motherhood of Mary, the manner of being and loving in the world was established: A tendering of the human family of God in littleness and simplicity in the homeliness of hospitality in the welcoming of the stranger, the widow, the orphaned, and in the longing and never ceasing cry for the ones who had not come 'home' - the sinner, and (- as is the way with all mothers), for the ones who were in greatest danger - the dying.

As much as Eucharist drew Mary Potter to adore, praise and worship God made present in the world, it drew her too, to be that which she and all who followed, were to be - mothers, fashioned after the mother heart of the Son, and the mother heart of the Mother, called to work without ceasing that the Kingdom might come, and God reign in His world.

If that ideal was to be reached, however, it was important that two other elements, essential to the interior life of the individual, and the interior life of the congregation, be established in the hearts and minds of the members. If they were to be true followers of Jesus, in the manner of Mary, and if they were to come to Jesus through Mary, then they, like Jesus and Mary themselves, were to be poor and obedient - even to the Cross.

Poor and obedient [← Back](#)

To be called to religious life, for Mary Potter, was to be called to live a radical and singlehearted life style for love of God and neighbour. It was to embrace with joy and willingness, the command of the Gospel which said: “If you seek perfection, go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor. You will then have treasure in heaven. Afterward, come back and follow me” (Matt: 19: 21). It was also to enter into the truth of the doctrine of the Cross which Jesus preached to those who would be his disciples: “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny his very self, take up his cross and begin to follow in my footsteps. Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt16: 24-25).

The twin demands that were placed on those who longed to be followers of Jesus, were the demands of radical poverty and obedience. If the members of the Little Company were to understand themselves as religious - i.e. those who were by their free choice bound to God, then it was essential that poverty and obedience be lived not simply in the external behaviour of the individual, but in the heart. The merit of religious life lay not in the making of the vows, but in their living. Writing to the young society she said:

We are following a Crucified Lord we have been enlightened to know the Creator. The Holy Spirit has illumined our minds and taught us that though our God is a God of Mercy, He, the All-Pure God, is also a God of justice. Our reason tells us that we should do penance, we should lead a mortified life. This has been one of the principal reasons for the institution of the Religious life, it being difficult to practise penance in the world, where everyone, or we may say, perhaps the greater part of the human race, seek their own way, ease and comfort, not to be drawn along in the same strain. Certainly everyone in the world does not have ease and comfort there is much poverty and distress. The merit of poverty does not lie in the fact, but how it is borne. To be poor and hankering after riches is not meritorious poverty. (Conferences “F”, p. 79)

For Mary Potter, the spiritual dimension of the vows of Poverty and Obedience, lay in the manner in which the vows would free souls from all that was not of God. The vows were the liberators, which, in the words of the musical 'Godspell', would enable the soul to “ see Thee more clearly, Follow Thee more nearly, Love Thee more dearly, day by day.” If the true meaning of poverty and obedience for the sake of the kingdom were to be realised, they had to be embraced fully:

The religious who has embraced this state of poverty and who hankers after things contrary to her state, who is not contented with what she has given her, and ever desiring of other things, loses the merit of her state, is a most imperfect religious, and would do better in the world. So (too) with our penances, mortifications, and sufferings, it is not the amount we bear, but how we bear them. (ibid.)

To truly live the poverty of the Man of Sorrows, was to live open to the Spirit of God. It was to strip oneself of all that could betray the soul into serving two masters. For the Little Company of Mary, it was to accept the radical poverty of the Cross the poverty of the Servant King who died, stripped of every comfort, to give life to his friends. Again and again Mary Potter returns to this theme: The Spirit of the Little Company is the Spirit of Calvary:

We have our own spirit stamped, impressed, well defined. The spirit of Calvary. There we see suffering, poverty, and we fly not from our own model, Jesus. We desire to know of all things in this world, that we might desire to know but Jesus Christ, and Him Crucified. (Conferences "A" p.40)

At the heart of poverty lay the willingness to be stripped of all things that would stand in the way of union with God. But the heart of poverty also demanded that the talent entrusted to each be used to the full, for the greater glory of God. In Mary Potter, there was not the slightest doubt that gifts and talents were to be used for the sake of the kingdom. The demand was that the one who was poor in spirit and in truth, realised that gift, and used it in service, and not for self glory - and this applied to spiritual wealth as well:

My children, you must listen attentively to what I now say to you. You know that the world calls you poor since you have little of the world's goods. Yet heaven counts you rich, since you are loaded with heavenly treasures. You know this, you feel it. You will not be so ungrateful to your God as to deny what your heart tells you truly..... But remember, the one reason why you are thus enriched, is that mercy, having been shown to you, you may show mercy. The graces, the talents you have received, are given you to enrich the needy. God has charged you with great power that you might indeed work his works. (Conferences "B" p.50)

To be truly poor in spirit and in fact, meant to be detached from all that would move the soul from its central focus. Detachment cut across the roots of sin that lie deep within the human heart the root sins of lust, anger, greed, envy, laziness and pride, from which all other sins emerge. To live the life of the poor Jesus, to live the life of Mary, there had to be a radical pruning. Poverty, for Mary Potter was no light matter, it was a condition of the spiritual life, and it encompassed all things, and led one into the loneliness of the spiritual journey. Yet again, it was the path to Calvary, the path to union:

Do not put before beginners in the spiritual life, its difficulties, its hardships, the loneliness of the entire detachment necessary. Not all at once show them this, because you cannot show the wonderful help God gives, therefore it may not be a fair view you put before the soul. You may retard many from entering the path of perfection by this. They may truthfully feel they cannot do it. Neither could they, and the sweetness of suffering and sacrifice is not know to them. (AN Vol.5., p.13)

To live the life of radical poverty with Jesus meant living in tune with the love of a poor heart. Poverty, chosen for the sake of the kingdom, meant liberation and fellowship for Mary Potter. By being poor, in spirit and in fact, there would be no tendency within the Little Company to use possessions for their own sake but rather, for the sake of the kingdom. By voluntarily choosing poverty, members of the Little Company would be driven into the isolation, and the fragility of 'being-in-God.' The demands of the poor life would bring them into the arms of a God who smiles as he says:

“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow they neither toil nor spin yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little Faith?” (Matt: 6: 28-30)

In the primitive rule of the congregation, Mary Potter had seen that the kind of poverty to which the Little Company had been called, was a sharing in the life of the poor. She wrote:

An order whose spirit and model is to be the spirit of Calvary, and has Calvary as its model, must practise poverty in its integrity, and therefore its members, like poor people, must earn their living. (Conference “M” pp.1-3)

Reinforcing this concept she wrote: “The community will support themselves (sic), by any means the places they settle in furnish, teaching etc., The society will not accept a large donation except for the erection of a Church, strict poverty being the Spirit of Calvary.” (Annals No.1)

This radical poverty meant that the members of the institute were indeed to be immersed in the world, sharing the reality of physical poverty with the people of God. There was no separation, no alienation. If the spirit of the vow was to live as one poor - one totally dependent upon the grace of God to fulfil the cry of the hungry heart, that vertical dimension of the vow was crossed by the horizontal - to share with the poor, the hardship of earning one's daily bread, and making limited resources stretch to meet the needs of the community. This lived experience of poverty would also take the members of the congregation to the poor in loving service, and in true maternal love.

Only the truly poor in spirit could achieve the blessedness of working with the poor of Yahweh, without indictment, criticism, paternalism or self-righteous giving. Mary Potter's love for the poor came from her conviction that the poor are indeed blessed - they are indeed the happy ones who can reveal to the simple heart, the support, the fraternal charity, and the willingness to give, not out of an abundance, but out of a shared poverty. By living with and among the poor of Yahweh, blessings would come:

There is something in mixing with the poor which keeps us close to God, and after my return from Rome, with all its grandeurs and graces, with the constantly seeing the Holy Father, with the holy priests, who were our true friends, the visiting the shrines, the bodies of the Saints, the magnificent functions of the Church - with all this, when I went again among the poor, I said:

Life is worth Loving! (sic), as I carried one little thing or another to relieve the sick and brought the love of God

into their souls. (AN p.45)

Living within the Cross of poverty was to live within the providence of God and with the flexibility of a pilgrim. To that end, Mary Potter desired that the inner life of poverty, would be balanced by an external one. The society itself should be poor. There was to be a reluctance on the part of the institute to bind itself to anything that could detract from the flexibility of a people who had been called to be always on the move, searching out the lost, the abandoned, the strays. Even to invest in ownership was to be carefully assessed, for to bind oneself with property was to take on board the anxiety, the worldly care, of management. This would betray the simplicity of the congregation: Writing to one of the sisters (Mother Xavier) Mary stated:

“I am now writing to you to tell you some one must have written you misleading you regarding my view of property holding in the Little Company of Mary. I am not anxious for the Community to possess property.We do not require to be owners of houses or lands. We offer to God the daily pains we encounter, and trust to him. Perhaps the misunderstanding arose from this fact - we cannot go anywhere, new foundations - where we have rent and taxes to pay. A house must always be provided for us. See poor Commercial Road, where Sisters live among the poor and do much good. When Cardinal Vaughan was alive he gave them a very small sum of money yearly, but nothing is given to them now, and it takes two sisters to go about the streets begging nearly every day. They have to pay rent and taxes, for food and clothing. The consequence is that they could not do all that was required of hem.....(Conferences “R” p.36).

Against what the world called wisdom, or prudence, Mary Potter sought to inculcate in her sisters not only a dependence upon the providence of God, but also a genuine love of serving the poor out of a spirit of deep interior availability which was itself poverty. To serve the poor was to express the poverty of Jesus and Mary, who went about everywhere doing good. Mary wrote this time to “those who will come after us”:

We earnestly exhort those who will come after us to re-establish that primary spirit of a home of our Lady for the poor. We have only one at present Commercial Road - but we wish that such homes could be dotted all over the world. Oh, what conversions, what help to poor young girls in keeping them from danger. But we may not take up our time in describing what is so well known. However, we want to warn all future pioneers of the Little Company of Mary, in foreign lands, that these homes for the poor on earth are a joy and delight to God. We have always found them real homes, the Sisters too much taken up with the realities of life to be giving way to that terrible self-love which is so often given way to.....a Sister once said to me: Mother, working with the poor is so absorbing that although you must give way to eating, drinking and sleeping, all interest in these things are gone - your life's interest is all with the poor!” (ibid)

For Mary Potter, and for those who wished to follow her, there was a radical life to be lived. It was part of the vocation of the Cross, and it was complemented by the voluntary commitment to Obedience, that the life of love and service be achieved in the heart of each member. Obedience was the necessary training ground to live the commitment made through entering the Path of Mary, by which the Sister chose to abandon all things that she might possess the pearl of great price. If the member of the Little Company was to realise in spirit and in truth, the depth of her renewal of Baptismal

consecration, for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls, then the discipline of Obedience was essential. Again, however, (as with the vow of poverty), there was a vertical and horizontal dimension. For Mary Potter, obedience was one sure way of protecting the soul from delusion, and directing it solely to the will of God. As Jesus had sought to do only the will of the Father, even when that will took him into the pain and dying of Calvary and as Mary had embraced obedience to God, even at the possibility of losing her own life, so too, the member of the little Company was called to such total obedience. It was the complementary partner to a life of real liberty of spirit:

Liberty of spirit only exists where there is true humility, where the soul is emptied of self, and human respect is a thing of the past. How is that great virtue (liberty of spirit) to be obtained? Where shall we find it? From Mary. We shall seek and find it when we have lost our own spirit in her. (POM p. 8-9)

Mary Potter knew well that the soul needs to be exercised in virtue, if it is to grow into the holiness of its state of life. And for the members of the Little Company, the state of life they had been called to was that of a religious:

A religious means one bound. Mary's Own, though possessing more liberty of spirit, are still more bound than other religious, since they can neither dispose of their spiritual goods, their communions etc., they having offered these, as well as their temporal goods to Mary, to be employed as she pleases for God's honour and glory. Therefore, as other religious cannot give even a picture without leave, so Mary's Own religious, should ask permission before disposing of even one recital of the Rosary. This will bring home to themselves, "True Devotion", and facilitate their advance in it. (Conference "M")

This kind of obedience is the heart-lurching self abandonment that freezes us, and draws revulsion to our souls, and yet the truth of the gift asked, is that we seek all means of growing in the knowledge of ourselves, the knowledge of who we really are, in God. To enter into the life of pure, radical holiness, the holiness of children, the holiness of the simple, the holiness of the poor in spirit, requires commitment to the same pattern of radicality that the Gospel calls us to. What Mary Potter understood, was that she was God's. He had created her. There was nothing she had that he had not given her. And the return that she would make, was a total gift of herself. This was also the call to those who chose to follow her. The one constant way of ensuring fidelity to the path, was by submitting self to the discipline of obedience, as Christ had. In obedience there would be found the will of God. Not without discernment, not without pain, not without mistakes. All this was part of the commitment.

The vertical dimension of the vow was that it had been chosen by each member of the institute, as a way of being true to her inner self: The self that was called by name, and had to be true to that calling. Mary Potter understood this dimension of the vow. She wrote to Mother Magdalen:

"So long as I live, I would like to live under obedience. The holiest are not secure from delusions without it, much less such as I. God sees my wish, and will, I hope, accept my desire both to live and die under obedience. (Letter: Nov. 27, 1876)

The first demand of obedience was, for Mary Potter, a promise to be obedient to the integrity of the God-self that lives

within each human being. It was neither negation nor submission, but rather affirmation. An affirmation of the fact that “my self” is God's. Obedience is the manner of living faithfully to that 'self-in-God'. Mary wrote to her companions:

What is this fidelity, this faithfulness? It is doing our duty, yes, all human creatures have a duty to do, and are faithful to it, except where sin has produced disorder and broken the beautiful order laid down by God, by which all things tended to the object for which they were created, and performed it faithfully. The sun has to shine, it has to be faithful to the object for which it was created. Sin produced infidelity to duty, using things for an end not created, and general disorder.(Conferences “E” p.46)

As religious women, bound by a chosen commitment to live as perfectly as possible the Christian call to holiness, through the spirituality they followed and the confirmation of that Baptismal consecration through the vowed life, the members of the Little Company were called to embrace obedience and live it to the full. From a life of freely embraced obedience they would come to a new depth of love and unity with the God of their hearts. But they would also come to a new freedom, which would lead them into a new binding - anew dimension of love.

Whilst living the radical demands of an obedient life, in order that they may be faithful to the call to be in Christ in their individual lives, the paradox would be that they would find a “we” - an identity that embraced the world and all its people.

Obedient and poor, as Christ and Mary were obedient and poor, they would live within the confines of the law, yet transform it by that living. That is the prophetic witness of obedience - a life that is lived in obedience to a rule - in order to break apart the rules that deny the glory of the human soul. For Mary Potter, to live in obedience was to live in 'right order' - to live according to the truth of who you were called to be in God - and for the member of the Little Company of Mary, there was the constant call to remember her truth as a religious:

We must be convinced that the beauty of our lives as religious consists in our perfect obedience, and then we shall abound in charity and in all virtues that will endear us to our dear Lord. Obedience makes us practise a number of virtues, and we need to practise them if we are to be fruitful to our Spouse. All around us we can see reasons why we should strive to bear fruit. No one cares to behold a tree without flowering branches or ripening fruits. Why, then, allow our souls to wither and dry up? (B.C. Ch. 5., p. 43)

Because she was bound to union with her God as the essence of her existence, the member of the Little Company was to walk into the obedience of the Son of God, to be conformed into his image and likeness through a complete abandonment of herself to him and him alone.

If the reason for living the vow of obedience according to the spirit and the rules of the Institute was for the individual to grow into holiness and wholeness, it was also true that it was for the community and the world as well. Like poverty, the horizontal dimension - the mark of the Cross - was over the vow of obedience. There was no truth in living the vow, unless it brought the soul to love, and to work, so that others might live in love and freedom:

Having been called to a special service by a good and great master, our dear Lord himself, it is our bounded duty to build up the kingdom of God in the minds and hearts of those among whom we labour....Every soul we come in contact with, we must influence for good. We can hardly forget the sinner that must be called to repentance, yet there are the good we must strive to make better, and in whom we must increase the longing to be perfect. Such a labour is our duty.....(B.C. p. 41)

Obedience was far less a matter of maintaining the letter of the law, than it was a matter of understanding its spirit. One could force an exterior obedience, maintain an external conformity to the letter, but fail to understand the reality of both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of obedience: Mary wrote:

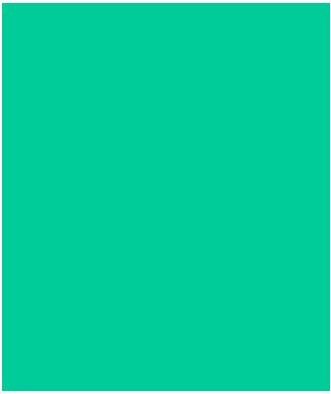
What should we think of one who, having been given money for the poor, spent it on herself? This is exactly what they do, who living in a community, founded to save souls, are not unselfish and zealous in their work, but use their graces only for their own good. Sisters of such type may save their own souls, but they will not help others to do so. They grow into selfish beings, and are no more like a generous devoted spouse of Jesus than a Pharisee was like an apostle. Exteriorly they may not be disedifying they may love to be punctual, they may do their duties carefully, just as many worldly people acquit themselves of their social duties but the burning zeal for souls, the heroic self-forgetfulness, the extreme generosity and the Christlike self oblation are wanting in them. My Sisters! I beg you not to relax! Spur yourselves on. Be not deceived by any specious reasoning such as: "I must take care of my health for the community's sake must be prudent for religion's sake....Happy for us, if we injure our health under obedience, or even shorten our lives through zeal for God. Indeed we might lawfully pray to God to grant us the great gift of self-oblation." (op. cit., Pp41-42)

To bow one's head to the will of another was not of the essence of the vow of obedience, unless it was the submission of one who truly believed in her commitment and consecration as a religious in the Little Company of Mary, and who sought to live her life in an outpouring of loving service to her community inside and outside the convent walls. Obedience was one of the nails binding the member of the Little Company to the Cross. It was also binding her to service and love in the spirit of her Mother. If the member of the Little Company was truly living her commitment, being what she had been called to be (living truly her state of life), then her obedience would be joy and blessedness, and would be joy and blessedness to and for others. Mary wrote:

Dear Sisters, we can have no surer sign that we are living by the sweet spirit of Jesus and Mary, and being a delight to the Eternal Father, than that we are zealous and obedient. (ibid)

If the individual and the community truly lived the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, then the sign of redemption would shine through them. That it was the sign of the Cross, would truly be the reflection of the upward reaching of the individual's heart to it's Creator, and the outward reaching arms that sought to love and bring others into the tender embrace of the Lord of all life.

Only by living the tension of being stretched up and outwards could the vocation of the Little Company be truly achieved in the world. And if this tension was maintained correctly, then, truly indeed, a most wonderful melody would be played in the world.



A melody that would have the power to attract and soothe the brokenhearted, even as it would attack and challenge the sickness, the violence, the despoilers of God's world. A ministry could be undertaken that would be a real expression of Gospel values and love. It would be a ministry of love and mercy. A witnessing to the truth that the kingdom has indeed begun on earth.

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