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Homily at Mass 16th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year C – 21 July 2019

The moon must know that it's the centre of so much attention here on earth at the moment – it seemed to glow with pure white radiance in the night sky late Friday evening. 50 years since 2 men set foot on the moon. People my age remember where they were 50 years ago. I was in Grade 4 at school. It was a typical Melbourne July day – wet, cold, grey, blustery. I can remember sitting with a large group of other school kids watching the fuzzy black and white images of two astronauts in their space suits almost bouncing along on the moon's surface. What an achievement it was for science! What an achievement it was for an individual man! And – incredibly – for the whole human race!

In the Creed we profess faith in God the Father and Creator – the maker of all things visible and invisible: things we can see and touch and feel and hold; things we can wonder about; as well as things that are invisible: things so tiny that it takes a microscope to see them, or things so far away that we require a telescope to gaze out far out into the vast Universe. Since the dawn of time, the human race has gazed up into the night sky – the moon, the stars, the planets – and wondered. What must life be like there? Can there be anyone else in the universe like us? This wondering has given us the story of Creation in the book of Genesis and so many myths like the Aboriginal Dreamtime, as well as the creative imagination of science fiction writers, poets and song writers. For us the beauty, wonder and vastness of the Universe, and the amazing panoply of life on earth and in the depths of the sea, all speak of the wonder, beauty, majesty and mystery of God the Creator of all things, visible and invisible.

Christian thought, prayer and reflection over 21 centuries has seen in the image of the moon something of the beauty and radiance of Our Lady, as well as the mystery of the Church. Christ is the golden sun – his light, his light as the Son of God, his light as the glorious risen Lord – shines, glows, radiates. Both Mary and the Church absorb Christ's light and shine with it. Mary is as beautiful and radiant as the moon. In the midst of a world as dark as the night Mary shines. She lights up the way. She guides us human travellers. She is a guiding star. Her light points to Christ, the source of light, goodness, heaven. In the last book of the Bible, the book of the Apocalypse, St John sees Mary adorned with the sun, standing on the moon, crowned with 12 stars.

Christian art also depicts Our Lady standing on the crescent moon. At Guadalupe Mexico in 1521 Our Lady appeared to St Juan Diego, a native Mexican peasant, and left an indelible picture of herself on his cloak. It can still be seen today enshrined in Mexico City: the pregnant Virgin, Mother of God, Mother of the Mexican people, enthroned on the moon.

Today we find ourselves in the home of the friends of Jesus, Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus at Bethany, not far from Jerusalem. We all know this story. How different the character and personality of the 2 women: Martha a busy house body; Mary so much quieter. Mary sits at Our Lord's feet, gazing into his face, drinking in his every word and silence, while Martha grows impatient and flustered with having to provide hospitality not only for Jesus but his 12 hungry apostles as well. You and I identify with both women – we sit with Mary at our Lord's feet as we take in the Word of God, and take nourishment from the Table of the Eucharist. At Mass we appreciate the peace, the quiet, the stillness, the prayer. We bring to Sunday Mass all that has filled the week just past – whatever is happening at home, our work responsibilities, the news of the week, and our own personal battles. And we take a deep breath before we re-engage with the world and daily life this week. Try as we might it can be a struggle to balance our prayer life and our daily practical life. How much we need the spirit of Mary, to find time each day to give to the Lord generously, lovingly, freely, that we might shine more and more with Christ is light.

This is a prayer of Bl John Henry Newman, who will be added to the canon or list of saints by Pope Francis in October:

Dear Jesus

Help me to spread Your fragrance everywhere I go

Flood my soul with Your spirit and life.

Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly,

That my life may only be a radiance of Yours.

Shine through me, and be so in me that every soul I come in

Contact with may feel Your presence in my soul.

Let them look up and see no longer me but only Jesus!

Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as You shine,

So to shine as to be a light to others; The light, O Jesus will be all from You;

none of it will be mine;

It will be you shining on others through me.