

Homily based on the readings from September 23, 2025 (Ezra 6.7-8, 12b, 14-20; Luke 8.19-21)

Over the past few weeks, we have had the good fortune to celebrate three different Marian feasts: the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Most Holy Name of Mary, and Our Lady of Sorrows. All three of these days, in their own way, call our attention to different aspects of Mary's *utterly* unique relationship with her son – and consequently with all of us. In this context, it is somewhat jarring to hear today's Gospel reading: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it." If we did not know better, we might *almost* think Jesus is being intentionally disrespectful to his Blessed Mother.

As with many Biblical passages, this one can cause a great deal of harm if we allow ourselves to misinterpret it. Unfortunately, many of our Protestant brothers and sisters take this one sentence – almost entirely out of context – as a justification for rejecting any kind of Marian devotion. They see it as evidence that – even though Mary played an

extraordinary part in the history of salvation – at a basic level she was just a normal woman, whose role was essentially completed the moment she gave birth to the Son of God.

Obviously, this perspective is totally misguided. In the words of Padre Pio, whose memorial we celebrate today: “Some people are so foolish that they think they can go through life without the help of the Blessed Mother.” While we do not want to be disrespectful of anyone else’s religious tradition, we also need to affirm what we know to be right. If we want to understand Christ’s true attitude toward his mother, all we have to do is listen to his words from the Cross: “Woman, behold, your son” and “Behold, your mother.” As we know, Jesus was not just entrusting the Blessed Mother and the Apostle John to each other’s care. He was, in fact, establishing Mary as the mother for *all* his faithful disciples – for all of us, as members of his one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

The original question, of course, still needs to be addressed: what did Jesus actually mean by his statement: “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it.” Although these words may initially catch us off guard, the important point is that Jesus was not *excluding* any of the members of his family – instead, he was *inviting* others to join them. Rather than denigrating his Blessed Mother, he was explaining what *made* her so blessed – what *made* her so full of grace. Remember her words to the Archangel Gabriel: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Mary *heard* the word of God and she *acted* on it. Rather than rejecting her as inconsequential, Jesus is holding her up as the *perfect* role model. To quote Padre Pio once again:

Let us endeavor, like so many elect souls, to follow this blessed Mother, to walk always close to her, not following any other path that leads to life, except the one trod by our Mother.

In other words, if we have the courage to follow in Mary's footsteps, we know *exactly* where they will lead us – safely home to the loving embrace of Jesus Christ.