

# WHAT THE 'PIETA' SAYS

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St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican City, Rome, has a world-famous sculpture –'Pieta' by the Renaissance artist Michelangelo. It depicts Mother Mary as a mourning young woman sitting down carrying the lifeless body of her beloved son Jesus in her lap. Her meditative look depicting the broken dreams she had fondly cherished for so long in her heart is capable of eliciting emotional responses from any viewer with a tender heart. Once when I saw a portrait of that sculpture, what struck me was the onslaught of stormy clouds of sorrow in her life. But when a ray of spirituality illumined my inner vision, I recognized on the mourning face of Mary the glitter of her virtues which would also instill the beauty of divinity into my mind.

If we probe deeper into that marble sculpture, which is capable of giving us divine thoughts of spirituality beyond words, figures or metaphoric expressions, we can see in 'Pieta' the countenance and attitude of motherhood throbbing with affection and purity. No ancient classic has ever presented motherhood with such deep understanding. Pieta is the artistic depiction of the 13<sup>th</sup> station of the 'Via Sacra'.

When we reach the 13<sup>th</sup> station in Way of the Cross, a deep sigh escapes from our being because there we see the pain of a mother holding his young dead son. In the Pieta, we see Mary looking at the bruises, lacerations and deep cuts the world had inflicted on her son's tender body. She is in a meditative mood. That meditation lads her into a new understanding. The pain and heaviness of her heart slowly melts into some blissful insight. Her eyes now glitter with new hopes. Even when she looks into the bleeding face of her son, tears do not wet her eyes. Mary had never sung any elegy in her life. She had only sung the Hymn of Praise (Lk 1:46-56). She had once heard the difficult news brought by Angel Gabriel and had transformed it into Good News in her heart. She had learnt how to keep silence before God's will. It is this silence and this meditation that gave her the strength to move along the paths of God without lurch and stagger.

Didn't we have more than our fair share of the 'Pieta' experiences in our lives? Nightmarish times when we had to dwell under the roof of helplessness, in the vale of despair, as our cherished dreams came crashing down, crumbling into smithereens? Hopes and dreams that were ruthlessly chopped off by the scimitar of the hatred of our malefactors and adversaries? Wounded memories of lying lonely in the sick bed with nobody to share our pain with? Bitter pangs of misunderstanding and alienation even when we have wished only well for others? My dear Friend, your life may be straddled with numberless Pieta experiences. But can you, like Mary, nurture and transform these experiences into

visions of glory? If you can cleanse your injured feelings before the will of God, your Pieta experiences will prove beneficial and blissful to you.

The word 'Pieta' means faithfulness. For Mary it was absolute faithfulness. As we read the distance between Bethlehem and Calvary, we see the character Mary who experiences so many sorrows, one after the other. In spite of all these excruciating experiences, Mary became 'full of grace' and blessed amongst women. The secret behind her triumph was her unquestioning obedience to God and her unceasing loyalty to mankind. Pieta tells us: If God wants something from you that you dearly love in the journey of your life, follow the Nazarene being faithful to your covenant. Enter into the meditative mood of Mary in spite of your wounds and wounded feelings. When the gnashing of teeth and the lamentations melt in the tears of God's love; your eddied whirlpools of bitterness and pain will transform into streams of grace, shores of abundance. So don't curse your 'Pieta' experience. Mary was rewarded with Assumption for her loyalty and obedience. As we pass through our bitter 'Pietas' let us seek the intercession of Mary.