



The Holy See

HOLY MASS ON THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

XLVIII WORLD DAY OF PEACE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica

Thursday, 1st January 2015

[Multimedia]

Today we are reminded of the words of *blessing* which Elizabeth spoke *to the Virgin Mary*: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?” (*Lk* 1:42-43).

This blessing is *in continuity with the priestly blessing* which God had given to Moses to be passed on to Aaron and to all the people: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace” (*Num* 6:24-26). In celebrating the Solemnity of Mary Most Holy, the Holy Mother of God, the Church reminds us that Mary, more than anyone else, received this blessing. In her the blessing finds fulfilment, for no other creature has ever seen God’s face shine upon it as did Mary. She gave a human face to the eternal Word, so that all of us can contemplate him.

In addition to contemplating God’s face, we can also praise him and glorify him, like the shepherds who came away from Bethlehem with a song of thanksgiving after seeing the Child and his young mother (cf. *Lk* 2:16). The two were together, just as they were together at Calvary, because *Christ and his mother are inseparable*: there is a very close relationship between them, as there is between every child and his or her mother. The flesh (*caro*) of Christ – which, as Tertullian says, is the hinge (*cardo*) of our salvation – was knit together in the womb of Mary (cf. *Ps* 139:13). This inseparability is also clear from the fact that Mary, chosen beforehand to be the Mother of the Redeemer, shared intimately in his entire mission, remaining at her Son’s side to the end on Calvary.

Mary is so closely united to Jesus because she received from him the knowledge of the heart, the knowledge of faith, nourished by her experience as a mother and by her close relationship with her Son. The Blessed Virgin is the woman of faith who made room for God in her heart and in her plans; she is the believer capable of perceiving in the gift of her Son the coming of that “fullness of time”(Gal 4:4) in which God, by choosing the humble path of human existence, entered personally into the history of salvation. That is why Jesus cannot be understood without his Mother.

Likewise inseparable are Christ and the Church – because the Church and Mary are always together and this is precisely the mystery of womanhood in the ecclesial community – and the salvation accomplished by Jesus cannot be understood without appreciating the motherhood of the Church. To separate Jesus from the Church would introduce an “absurd dichotomy”, as Blessed [Paul VI](#) wrote (*[Evangelii Nuntiandi](#)*, 16). It is not possible “to love Christ but without the Church, to listen to Christ but not the Church, to belong to Christ but outside the Church” (*ibid.*). For the Church is herself God’s great family, which brings Christ to us. Our faith is not an abstract doctrine or philosophy, but a vital and full relationship with a person: Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God who became man, was put to death, rose from the dead to save us, and is now living in our midst. Where can we encounter him? We encounter him in the Church, in our hierarchical, Holy Mother Church. It is the Church which says today: “Behold the Lamb of God”; it is the Church, which proclaims him; it is in the Church that Jesus continues to accomplish his acts of grace which are the sacraments.

This, the Church’s activity and mission, is an expression of her motherhood. For she is like a mother who tenderly holds Jesus and gives him to everyone with joy and generosity. No manifestation of Christ, even the most mystical, can ever be detached from the flesh and blood of the Church, from the historical concreteness of the Body of Christ. Without the Church, Jesus Christ ends up as an idea, a moral teaching, a feeling. Without the Church, our relationship with Christ would be at the mercy of our imagination, our interpretations, our moods.

Dear brothers and sisters! *Jesus Christ is the blessing* for every man and woman, and for all of humanity. The Church, in giving us Jesus, offers us the fullness of the Lord’s blessing. This is precisely the mission of the people of God: to spread to all peoples God’s blessing made flesh in Jesus Christ. And Mary, the first and most perfect disciple of Jesus, the first and most perfect believer, the model of the pilgrim Church, is the one who opens the way to the Church’s motherhood and constantly sustains her maternal mission to all mankind. Mary’s tactful maternal witness has accompanied the Church from the beginning. She, the Mother of God, is also the Mother of the Church, and through the Church, the mother of all men and women, and of every people.

May this gentle and loving Mother obtain for us the Lord’s blessing upon the entire human family. On this, the World Day of Peace, we especially implore her intercession that the Lord may *grant peace in our day*; peace in hearts, peace in families, peace among the nations. The [message for](#)

the Day of Peace this year is *“No Longer Slaves, but Brothers and Sisters”*. All of us are called to be free, all are called to be sons and daughters, and each, according to his or her own responsibilities, is called to combat modern forms of enslavement. From every people, culture and religion, let us join our forces. May he guide and sustain us, who, in order to make us all brothers and sisters, became our servant.

Let us look to Mary, let us contemplate the Holy Mother of God. I suggest that you all greet her together, just like those courageous people of Ephesus, who cried out before their pastors when they entered Church: “Holy Mother of God!” What a beautiful greeting for our Mother. There is a story – I do not know if it is true – that some among those people had clubs in their hands, perhaps to make the Bishops understand what would happen if they did not have the courage to proclaim Mary “Mother of God”! I invite all of you, without clubs, to stand up and to greet her three times with this greeting of the early Church: “Holy Mother of God!”