



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

TO ROMANIA

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HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS

Catholic Saint Joseph Cathedral (Bucarest)

Friday, 31 May 2019

[Multimedia]

The Gospel we have just heard draws us into the encounter between two women who embrace, overflowing with joy and praise. The child leaps for joy in Elizabeth's womb and she blesses her cousin for her faith. Mary sings of the mighty things that the Lord has done for his humble servant; hers is the great hymn of hope for those who can no longer sing because they have lost their voice. That hymn of hope is also meant to rouse us today, and to make us join our voices to it. It does this with three precious elements that we can contemplate in the first of the disciples: *Mary journeys, Mary encounters, Mary rejoices*.

Mary journeys... from Nazareth to the house of Zechariah and Elizabeth. It is the first of Mary's journeys, as related by the Scriptures. The first of many. She will journey from Galilee to Bethlehem, where Jesus will be born; she will go down to Egypt to save her Child from Herod; she will go up again every year to Jerusalem for the Passover (cf. *Lk 2:31*), and ultimately she will follow Jesus to Calvary. These journeys all have one thing in common: they were never easy; they always required courage and patience. They tell us that Our Lady knows what it means to walk uphill, she knows what it means for us to walk uphill, and she is our sister at every step of the way. She knows what it is to be weary of walking and she can take us by the hand amid our difficulties,

in the most perilous twists and turns in our life's journey.

As a good mother, Mary knows that love grows daily amid the little things of life. A mother's love and ingenuity was able to turn a stable into a home for Jesus, with poor swaddling clothes and an abundance of love (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 286). Contemplating Mary enables us to turn our gaze to all those many women, mothers and grandmothers of these lands who, by their quiet sacrifices, devotion and self-denial, are shaping the present and preparing the way for tomorrow's dreams. Theirs is a silent, tenacious and unsung sacrifice; they are unafraid to "roll up their sleeves" and shoulder difficulties for the sake of their children and families, "hoping against hope" (*Rm* 4:18). The living memory of your people preserves this powerful sense of hope against every attempt to dim or extinguish it. Looking to Mary and to all those mothers' faces, we experience and are nourished by that sense of hope (cf. *Aparecida Document*, 536), which gives birth to and opens up the horizons of the future. Let us state it emphatically: in our people there is much room for hope. That is why Mary's journey continues even today; she invites us, with her, to *journey together*.

Mary encounters Elizabeth (cf. *Lk* 1:39-56), a woman already advanced in years (v. 7). But Elizabeth, though older, is the one who speaks of the future and, "filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 41), prophesies in words that foreshadow the last of the Gospel beatitudes: "Blessed are those who believe" (cf. *Jn* 20:29). Remarkably, the younger woman goes to meet the older one, seeking her roots, while the older woman is reborn and prophetically foretells the future of the younger one. Here, young and old meet, embrace and awaken the best of each. It is a miracle brought about by the culture of encounter, where no one is discarded or pigeonholed, but all are sought out, because all are needed to reveal the Lord's face. They are not afraid to walk together, and when this happens, God appears and works wonders in his people. The Holy Spirit impels us to go out from ourselves, from all that hems us in, from the things to which we cling.

The Spirit teaches us to look beyond appearances and enables us to *speak well* of others – to *bless* them. This is especially true with regard to our brothers and sisters who are homeless, exposed to the elements, lacking perhaps not only a roof over their head or a crust of bread, but the friendship and warmth of a community to embrace, shelter and accept them. This is the culture of encounter; it urges us as Christians to experience the miraculous motherhood of the Church, as she seeks out, protects and gathers her children. In the Church, when different rites meet, when the most important thing is not one's own affiliation, group or ethnicity, but the People that together praises God, then great things take place. Again, let us state it emphatically: Blessed are those who believe (cf. *Jn* 20:29) and who have the courage to foster encounter and communion.

Mary, as she journeys to visit Elizabeth, reminds us where God desired to dwell and live, where his sanctuary is, and where we can feel his heartbeat: it is in the midst of his People. There he is, there he lives, there he awaits us. We can apply to ourselves the prophet's call not to fear, not to let our arms grow weak! For the Lord our God is in our midst; he is a powerful saviour (cf. *Zeph* 3:16-17) and he is in the midst of his people. This is the secret of every Christian: God is in our

midst as a powerful saviour. Our certainty of this enables us, like Mary, to sing and exult with joy.

Mary rejoices. She rejoices because she bears in her womb Emmanuel, God-with-us: “The Christian life is joy in the Holy Spirit” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 122). Without joy, we remain paralyzed, slaves to our unhappiness. Often problems of faith have little to do with a shortage of means and structures, of quantity, or even the presence of those who do not accept us; they really have to do with a shortage of joy. Faith wavers when it just floats along in sadness and discouragement. When we live in mistrust, closed in on ourselves, we contradict the faith. Instead of realizing that we are God’s children for whom he does great things (cf. v. 49), we reduce everything to our own problems. We forget that we are not orphans. In our sadness, we forget that we are not orphans, for we have a Father in our midst, a powerful saviour. Mary comes to our aid, because instead of reducing things, she magnifies them in “magnifying” the Lord, in praising his greatness.

Here we find the secret of our joy. Mary, lowly and humble, starts from God’s greatness and despite her problems – which were not few – she is filled with joy, for she entrusts herself to the Lord in all things. She reminds us that God can always work wonders if we open our hearts to him and to our brothers and sisters. Let us think of the great witnesses of these lands: simple persons who trusted in God in the midst of persecution. They did not put their hope in the world, but in the Lord, and thus they persevered. I would like to give thanks for these humble victors, these saints-next-door, who showed us the way. Their tears were not in vain; they were a prayer that rose to heaven and nurtured the hope of this people.

Dear brothers and sisters, Mary journeys, encounters and rejoices because she carries something greater than herself: she is the bearer of a blessing. Like her, may we too be unafraid to bear the blessing that Romania needs. May you be promoters of a culture of encounter that gives the lie to indifference, a culture that rejects division and allows this land to sing out the mercies of the Lord.