



The Holy See

HOLY MASS ON THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

57th WORLD DAY OF PEACE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

St Peter's Basilica

Monday, 1st January 2024

[\[Multimedia\]](#)

The words of the Apostle Paul illumine the beginning of this new year: “When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman” (*Gal* 4:4). The expression “the fullness of time” is striking. In ancient times, time was measured using vases of water; the passage of time was marked by how long it took for an empty vase to be filled. Hence the meaning of the phrase “fullness of time”: once the vase of history is filled, divine grace spills over. God becomes man and he does so through a woman, Mary. She is the means chosen by God, the culmination of that long line of individuals and generations that “drop by drop” prepared for the Lord’s coming into the world. The Mother, then, stands at the very heart of the mystery of time. It pleased God to turn history around through her, the *woman*. With that one word, “woman”, the Scripture brings us back to the beginning, to Genesis, and makes us realize that the Mother and Child mark a new creation, a new beginning. Thus, at the beginning of the time of salvation, there is the Holy Mother of God, our Holy Mother.

It is fitting, then, that the year should open by invoking her; it is fitting that God’s faithful people should acclaim her with joy, as once those bold Christians did in Ephesus, as the *Holy Mother of God*. For those words, *Mother of God*, express the joyful certainty that the Lord, a tiny Child in his Mamma’s arms, has united himself *forever* to our humanity, to the point that it is no longer only ours, but his as well. *Mother of God*: a simple phrase that confesses the Lord’s eternal covenant

with us. *Mother of God*: a dogma of faith, but also a “dogma of hope”; God in man, and man in God, forever. The Holy Mother of God.

In the fullness of time, the Father sent his Son, born of a woman. But Saint Paul also speaks of a second sending: “God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba, Father!’” (*Gal* 4:6). In the sending of the Spirit, the Mother also plays a central role: the Holy Spirit comes to rest upon her at the Annunciation (cf. *Lk* 1:35); later, at the birth of the Church, he descends upon the apostles gathered in prayer “with Mary, the Mother” (*Acts* 1:14). Mary’s receptiveness to the working of the Spirit brought us the greatest of all gifts: she “enabled the Lord of Majesty to become our brother” (THOMAS OF CELANO, *Vita secunda*, CL, 198: FF 786), so that the Spirit can cry out in our hearts: “Abba, Father!” The motherhood of Mary is the path leading us to the paternal tenderness of God, the closest, most direct and easiest of paths. This is God’s “style”: closeness, compassion and tenderness. Indeed, the Mother leads us to the beginning and heart of faith, which is not a theory or a task, but a boundless gift that makes us beloved sons and daughters, tabernacles of the Father’s love. It follows that welcoming the Mother into our lives is not a matter of devotion but a requirement of faith: “If we want to be Christians, we must be ‘Marians’” (SAINT PAUL VI, *Homily in Cagliari*, 24 April 1970), that is “children of Mary”.

The Church needs Mary in order to recover her own feminine face, to resemble more fully the woman, Virgin and Mother, who is her model and perfect image (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 63), to make space for women and to be “generative” through a pastoral ministry marked by concern and care, patience and maternal courage. The world, too, needs to look to mothers and to women in order to find peace, to emerge from the spiral of violence and hatred, and once more see things with genuinely human eyes and hearts. Every society needs to accept the gift that is woman, every woman: to respect, defend and esteem women, in the knowledge that whosoever harms a single woman profanes God, who was “born of a woman”.

Just as Mary, the *woman*, played a decisive role in the fullness of time, she is also decisive in the lives of each of us, for no one knows better than a Mother the stages of growth and the urgent needs of her children. Mary shows us this in yet another “beginning”: the first sign that Jesus performs, at the wedding feast of Cana. There, she is the one who realizes that the wine has run out, and who appeals to Jesus (cf. *Jn* 2:3). The needs of her children move her, the Mother, to beg Jesus to intervene. At Cana, Jesus says: “‘Fill the jars with water’. And they filled them up to the brim” (*Jn* 2:7). Mary knows our needs; she intercedes to make grace overflow in our lives and to guide them to authentic fulfilment. Brothers and sisters, all of us have our shortcomings, our times of loneliness, our inner emptiness that cries out to be filled. Each of us knows this well. Who can fill our emptiness if not Mary, the *Mother of fullness*? Whenever we are tempted to retreat into ourselves, let us run to her; whenever we are no longer able to untie the knots in our lives, let us seek refuge in her. Our times, bereft of peace, need a Mother who can reunite the human family. Let us look to Mary, in order to become artisans of unity. Let us do so with her maternal creativity and concern for her children. For she unites them and consoles them; she

listens to their troubles and she dries their tears. And let us look upon that tender icon of the *Virgo lactans* [of Montevergine Abbey]. That is how our mother is with: how tenderly she looks after us and draws close to us. She cares for us and remains close to us.

Let us entrust this coming year to the Mother of God. Let us consecrate our lives to her. With tender love, she will open our eyes to their fullness. For she will lead us to Jesus, who is himself “the fullness of time”, of every time, of our own time, of each one of us. Indeed, as was once written: “It was not the fullness of time that brought about the sending of the Son of God, but the sending of the Son that brought about the fullness of time” (cf. MARTIN LUTHER, *Vorlesung über den Galaterbrief* 1516-1517, 18). Brothers and sisters, may this year be filled with the consolation of the Lord! May this year be filled with the tender maternal love of Mary, the Holy Mother of God.

I now invite all of us together to proclaim three times: *Holy Mother of God! Holy Mother of God! Holy Mother of God!*