



The Holy See

POPE JOHN PAUL II **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Wednesday, 22 October 1997

Faithful have filial devotion to Mary

1. The Second Vatican Council states that devotion to the Blessed Virgin, "as it has always existed in the Church, for all its uniqueness, differs essentially from the cult of adoration, which is offered equally to the Incarnate Word and to the Father and the Holy Spirit, and it is most favourable to it" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 66).

With these words the Constitution *Lumen gentium* stresses the characteristics of Marian devotion. Although the veneration of the faithful for Mary is superior to their devotion to the other saints, it is nevertheless inferior to the cult of adoration reserved to God, from which it essentially differs. The term "adoration" indicates the form of worship that man offers to God, acknowledging him as Creator and Lord of the universe. Enlightened by divine Revelation, the Christian adores the Father "in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:23). With the Father, he adores Christ, the Incarnate Word, exclaiming with the Apostle Thomas: "My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:28). Lastly, in this same act of adoration he includes the Holy Spirit, who "with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified" (DS 150), as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed recalls.

When the faithful call upon Mary as "Mother of God" and contemplate in her the highest dignity conferred upon a creature, they are still not offering her a veneration equal to that of the divine Persons. There is an infinite distance between Marian veneration and worship of the Trinity and the Incarnate Word.

As a consequence, although the Christian community addresses the Blessed Virgin in language that sometimes recalls the terms used in the worship of God, it has a completely different meaning and value. Thus the love of the faithful for Mary differs from what they owe God: while the Lord must be loved above everything with all one's heart, with all one's soul and with all one's mind (cf. Mt 22:37), the sentiment joining Christians to the Blessed Virgin suggests, at a spiritual level, the affection of children for their mother.

2. Nevertheless there is a continuity between Marian devotion and the worship given to God: indeed, the honour paid to Mary is ordered and leads to adoration of the Blessed Trinity.

The Council recalls that Christian veneration of the Blessed Virgin "is most favourable to" the worship of the Incarnate Word, the Father and the Holy Spirit. It then adds from a Christological viewpoint that "the various forms of piety towards the Mother of God, which the Church has approved within the limits of sound and orthodox doctrine, according to the dispositions and understanding of the faithful, ensure that while the Mother is honoured, the Son through whom all things have their being (cf. Col 1:15-16) and in whom it has pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell (cf. Col 1:19) is rightly known, loved and glorified and his commandments are observed" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 66).

Since the Church's earliest days, Marian devotion has been meant to foster faithful adherence to Christ. To venerate the Mother of God is to affirm the divinity of Christ. In fact, the Fathers of the Council of Ephesus, in proclaiming Mary *Theotókos*, "Mother of God", intended to confirm the belief in Christ, true God.

The conclusion of the account of Jesus' first miracle, obtained at Cana by Mary's intercession, shows how her action was directed to the glorification of her Son. In fact the Evangelist says: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him" (Jn 2:11).

3. Marian devotion also encourages adoration of the Father and the Holy Spirit in those who practise it according to the Church's spirit. In fact, by recognizing the value of Mary's motherhood, believers discover in it a special manifestation of God the Father's tenderness.

The mystery of the Virgin Mother highlights the action of the Holy Spirit, who brought about the conception of the child in her womb and continually guided her life.

The titles of Comforter, Advocate, Helper attributed to Mary by popular Christian piety do not overshadow but exalt the action of the Spirit, the Comforter, and dispose believers to benefit from his gifts.

4. Lastly, the Council recalls the "uniqueness" of Marian devotion and stresses the difference between adoration of God and veneration of the saints.

This devotion is unrepeatable because it is directed to a person whose personal perfection and mission are unique.

Indeed, the gifts conferred upon Mary by divine love, such as her immaculate holiness, her divine motherhood, her association with the work of Redemption and above all the sacrifice of the Cross, are absolutely exceptional.

Devotion to Mary expresses the Church's praise and recognition of these extraordinary gifts. To

her, who is Mother of the Church and Mother of humanity, the Christian people turn, encouraged by filial trust, to request her motherly intercession and to obtain the necessary goods for earthly life in view of eternal happiness.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, the Holy Father said:

I am pleased to greet all the English-speaking pilgrims, especially those from England, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Japan, Canada and the United States. I invoke upon you strength and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

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