



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 5 January 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. A few days after the opening of the Great Jubilee, I am pleased today to begin the first General Audience of 2000 by offering my most cordial wishes for the Jubilee Year to everyone here: may it truly be a special time of grace, reconciliation and interior renewal.

This past year, the final one dedicated to immediate preparation for the Jubilee, we reflected together on the mystery of the Father. Today, at the end of that series of reflections and as a special introduction to the catecheses of the Holy Year, let us once again lovingly consider the person of Mary.

In her, the "*beloved daughter of the Father*" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 53), the divine plan of love for humanity was manifested. Destining her to become the mother of his Son, the Father chose her from among all creatures and raised her to the highest dignity and mission in the service of his people.

The Father's plan begins to be revealed in the "Protoevangelium", when, after the fall of Adam and Eve, God announces that he will put enmity between the serpent and the woman: it will be the woman's son who will crush the serpent's head (cf. *Gn* 3: 15).

The promise begins to be fulfilled at the Annunciation, when Mary is given the proposal to become the Mother of the Saviour.

2. "Rejoice, full of grace" (*Lk* 1: 28). The first word that the Father speaks to Mary through his angel is a form of greeting which can be understood as an invitation to joy, an invitation that echoes the one addressed by the prophet Zechariah to the entire people of Israel: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Lo, your king comes to you" (*Zec* 9: 9; cf. also *Zep* 3: 14-18). With this first word addressed to Mary, the Father reveals his intention to communicate true and definitive joy to humanity. The Father's own joy, which consists in having his Son beside him, is offered to everyone, but it is first of all entrusted to Mary so that it may spread from her throughout the human community.

3. For Mary, the invitation to rejoice is linked to the special gift she received from the Father: "Full of grace". The Greek expression "kecharitoméne" is often translated, and not without reason, as "filled with grace": it is, in fact, an abundance that reaches the highest degree.

We can see that the expression sounds as if it were Mary's very name, the "name" given to her by the Father from the beginning of her existence. From the moment of conception, in fact, her soul was filled with every blessing, enabling her to live in outstanding holiness throughout her earthly life.

Mary's face reflects the mysterious face of the Father. The infinite tenderness of God-Love is revealed in the maternal features of Jesus' Mother.

4. Mary is the only mother who can say "my son" when speaking of Jesus, just as the Father says: "You are my Son" (*Mk* 1: 11). For his part, Jesus calls the Father "Abba", "Dad" (cf. *Mk* 14: 36), while he calls Mary "Mama", putting all his filial affection into this name.

After leaving his mother in Nazareth, when he later meets her, he calls her "woman" to emphasize that he now takes orders from the Father alone and to declare that she is not just a biological mother, but has a mission to fulfil as the "Daughter of Zion" and the mother of the people of the New Covenant. As such, Mary's goal is always to comply fully with the Father's will.

This was not the case with all of Jesus' family. The fourth Gospel reveals to us that his relatives "did not believe in him" (*Jn* 7: 5), and Mark says that "they went out to seize him, for they said, "He is beside himself" (*Mk* 3: 21). We can be sure that Mary's inner thoughts were completely different.

We are assured of this in the Gospel of Luke, in which Mary presents herself as the humble "handmaid of the Lord" (*Lk* 1: 38). It is in this light that we should understand Jesus' answer when "he was told: "Your mother and your brethren are standing outside, desiring to see you" (*Lk* 8: 20; cf. *Mt* 12: 46-47; *Mk* 3: 32); Jesus replied: "My mother and my brethren are those who hear the word of God and do it" (*Lk* 8: 21). Mary, in fact, is a model of listening to the Word of God (cf. *Lk* 2: 19, 51) and of docility to it.

5. The Virgin maintained and perseveringly renewed the total willingness she had expressed at the Annunciation. The immense privilege and sublime mission of being the Mother of God's Son did not change her humble submission to the Father's plan. Among the other aspects of this divine plan, she took up the educational task that her motherhood entailed. A mother not only gives birth, but is also actively involved in the formation and development of her child's personality. Mary's behaviour certainly influenced Jesus' conduct. One can think, for example, that the act of washing feet (cf. *Jn* 13: 4-5), left to the disciples as an example to follow (cf. *Jn* 13: 14-15), reflects what Jesus himself had seen since childhood in Mary's behaviour when she washed their guests' feet in a spirit of humble service.

According to Gospel testimony, during the time he spent in Nazareth, Jesus was "obedient" to Mary and Joseph (cf. *Lk* 2: 51). He thus received from Mary a true education that shaped his humanity. On the other hand, Mary let herself be influenced and formed by her Son. In Jesus' gradual manifestation, she discovered the Father more and more profoundly and offered him homage with all the love of her daughterly heart. Her task now is to help the Church to walk in Christ's footsteps as she did.

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

I cordially welcome the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present, and I pray that your visit to Rome will help you to live a grace-filled Jubilee Year. God bless you all!

The Holy Father appealed for peace in the Moluccas, where deadly clashes have recently broken out. May Bethlehem's message of peace, which in the past few days the Church has once again proclaimed to the whole world, resound loudly in the places tried by natural disasters or wars, especially in the Moluccas, where in recent weeks the ethnic and religious conflict, which has afflicted those Indonesian islands for some time, has again flared up in deadly clashes. "Peace on earth to those whom God loves"! May this message, welcomed by every heart, break the chain of revenge, heal the wounds of hatred and, by definitively removing the temptation of violence, spur Christians and Muslims to see themselves as members of one human family and to rebuild harmonious relations with one another in justice and forgiveness.

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