



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE

GATHERED IN THE VATICAN BASILICA *Wednesday, 10 January 1979*

Dear Boys and Girls,

1. This morning, too, there are so many, so very many of you! This great Basilica is pervaded with the joyful pulsation of your youth and is brightened by the light of your smile. The warmth of enthusiasm spreads on the wave of your silvery voices and becomes an invitation to confidence and optimism, in spite of the dark clouds that can be glimpsed on the horizon even in this dawn of the new year. God be thanked for the freshness of your sentiments and for the sincerity of your adherence to every great and noble ideal!

The subject to which I would like to call your attention at this moment is very close to your sensibility. I would like, in fact, to linger with you to look again at the marvellous scene which the mystery of Christmas put before our eyes. It is a scene that is familiar to you: many of you have relived it actively in these days, constructing a crib in your homes. Well, among the protagonists of this scene, I call on you this morning to look at Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother.

The Church itself suggests to us this particular attention for the Blessed Virgin: it willed that the last day of the octave of Christmas and the first day of the new year should be dedicated to celebration of Mary's Motherhood. The intention to highlight the "place" of the Mother, I would say the "motherly dimension" of the whole mystery of the human birth of God, is, therefore, evident.

2. This is not an intention that is manifested only on this day. The Church's veneration for the Madonna—a veneration that surpasses the cult of every other saint and takes the name of "hyperdulia"—invests the whole liturgical year.

March 25 is the day on which the moment of the Annunciation, that is, the incarnation of the eternal Word in the Virgin's pure womb, is recalled. From that day up to 25 December, it can be said that the Church discreetly but with deep awareness, walks with Mary, living with her the expectancy of every mother: expectancy of the birth, expectancy of Christmas. And at the same time, during this period, Mary "walks" with the Church. Her motherly expectancy is inscribed, in a

quiet but very real way, in the life of the Church throughout the year. What happened between Nazareth, Ain Karin and Bethlehem, is the subject of the liturgy of the Church, of its prayer—especially the prayer of the Rosary—and of its contemplation.

3. Everything begins with the conversation between the Virgin and the Archangel Gabriel: "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" (*Lk* 1:34). Answer: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (*Lk* 1:35). At the same time as physical motherhood, Mary's spiritual motherhood began, a motherhood which filled the nine months of waiting, but which was prolonged also beyond the moment of the birth of Jesus to embrace the thirty years spent between Bethlehem, Egypt and Nazareth, and then also the years of Jesus' public life, when the Son of Mary left his home in Nazareth to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom: years which culminated in the events of Calvary and in the supreme sacrifice on the Cross.

It was just here, under the Cross, that Mary's spiritual motherhood reached its key-moment, in a certain sense. "When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" (*Jn* 19:26). Thus Jesus linked Mary, his Mother, in a new way with man: with man, to whom he had given the Gospel.

Jesus linked her, then, with every man, as he united her, subsequently, with the Church, on the day of its historic birth, that is, the day of Pentecost. From that day, the whole Church had her as Mother, and all men have her as Mother. They understand the words spoken from the Cross, as addressed to each of them. Spiritual motherhood knows no limits; it extends in time and in space, and reaches all human hearts. It reaches whole nations and becomes the keystone of human culture. Motherhood: a great, splendid, fundamental human reality, present at the beginning of time in the Creator's plan, solemnly reconfirmed in the mystery of the Birth of God, with which it now remains inseparably linked.

4. I wish to exhort you, dear boys and girls, to love your mothers; accept her teachings and follow her example. A reflection of the sweetness, intuition, and generosity of Mary can be glimpsed on the face of every mother. Honouring your mother, you also honour her who, being Christ's mother, is also the mother of each of us.

I wish to remind girls, in particular, that motherhood is woman's vocation: it was yesterday, it is today, it will be always; it is her eternal vocation. There come to my mind the words of a song of my country. These say that a mother is the one who understands everything and embraces each of us with her heart. And they add that today the world is "hungrier and thirstier" than ever for that motherhood which, physically or spiritually, is woman's vocation, as it was Mary's.

My prayer is that today, too, the dignity of the mother will be recognized and protected in the family and in society. It will depend above all on you, young people, if this happens in the world of

tomorrow. Endeavour at once to look at your mothers with the eyes with which Jesus looked at his. Let her, the Virgin Mother, who is our hope, herself help you in this your resolution

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