



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE 23rd INTERNATIONAL
MARIOLOGICAL MARIAN CONGRESS**

Castel Gandolfo, Courtyard of the Apostolic Palace

Saturday, 8 September 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I welcome you all with great joy here at Castel Gandolfo as the 23rd Mariological Marian Congress draws to a close. Appropriately, you are reflecting on the theme: “Mariology since the Second Vatican Council: Reception, Results and Perspectives”, given that we are preparing to commemorate and to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the start of that great Council, which opened on 11 October 1962.

I cordially greet Cardinal Angelo Amato, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, who chaired the Congress; Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture and of the Council of Coordination of the Pontifical Academies, as well as the President and Academic Authorities of the Pontifical International Marian Academy, to whom I extend my gratitude for organizing this important event. I extend my greeting to the bishops, priests, men and women religious, the presidents and representatives of the Mariological Societies present, the experts in Mariology, and, lastly, all those who are participating in the Congress.

Blessed John XXIII wanted the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council to open precisely on 11 October, the very day on which in 431 the Council of Ephesus proclaimed Mary “*Theotokos*”, Mother of God (cf. AAS 54, 1962, 67-68). In this circumstance he began his Discourse with important and programmatic words: “*Gaudet Mater Ecclesia quod, singulari Divinae providentiae munere, optatissimus iam dies illuxit, quo, auspice Deipara Virgine, cuius materna dignitas hodie festo ritu recolitur, hic ad Beati Petri sepulchrum Concilium Oeucumenicum Vaticanum Secundum sollemniter initium capit*”, [in English: Mother Church rejoices that, by the singular gift of Divine

Providence, the longed-for day has finally dawned when — under the auspices of the virgin Mother of God, whose maternal dignity is commemorated on this day — the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council is being solemnly opened here near St Peter's tomb].

As you know, the *Year of Faith* will be solemnly opened this 11 October, to commemorate that extraordinary event, which I wished to announce with the Motu Proprio *Porta Fidei*, in which, presenting Mary as an exemplary model of faith, I invoke her special protection and intercession on the Church's journey, entrusting this season of grace to her, blessed because she believed. Today too, dear brothers and sisters, the Church rejoices in the liturgical celebration of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the All Holy, the Dawn of our salvation.

St Andrew of Crete, who lived between the seventh and eighth centuries, recorded for us the meaning of this Marian Feast in one of his famous *Homily for the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, the Theotokos* in which the event is presented as a precious piece of the extraordinary mosaic which is the divine plan for humanity's salvation: "This is the highest, all-embracing benefit that Christ has bestowed on us. This is the revelation of the mystery, this is the emptying out of the divine nature, the union of God and man, and the deification of the manhood that was assumed. This radiant and manifest coming of God to men most certainly needed a joyful prelude to introduce the great gift of salvation to us. The present festival, the birth of the Mother of God, is the prelude, while the final act is the fore-ordained union of the Word with flesh. Today the Virgin is born, tended and formed and prepared for her role as Mother of God, who is the universal King of the ages" (*Discourse 1*: PG 97, 806-807). This important and ancient testimony brings us to the heart of the theme on which you are reflecting and which the Second Vatican Council chose to emphasize in the title of Chapter VIII of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*: "The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church". This is the "*nexus mysteriorum*" of the close connection between the mysteries of the Christian faith, which the Council pointed out as a horizon for understanding the individual elements and the diverse affirmations of the patrimony of the Catholic faith.

At the Council in which, as a young theologian, I took part as a peritus, I had the opportunity to see the various ways of addressing themes concerning the figure and role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the history of salvation. At the Second Session of the Council, a large group of Fathers asked that Our Lady be treated in the Constitution on the Church, while an equally large group sustained the need for a specific document that would adequately highlight the dignity, privilege and unique role of Mary in the Redemption brought about by Christ. The voting of 29 October 1963 led to the decision to choose the first proposal and the outline of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church was enriched with the Chapter on Our Lady, in which the figure of Mary — reinterpreted and presented anew, drawing on the Word of God and the texts of the patristic and liturgical tradition, as well as from the extensive theological and spiritual reflection — appears in her full beauty and uniqueness, and closely inserted into the fundamental mysteries of the Christian faith. Mary, whose faith is underlined above all, is understood in the mystery of the love and communion of the

Most Holy Trinity; her function in the divine plan of salvation and in the unique mediation of Christ is clearly affirmed and given the proper importance, thereby making her a model and reference point for the Church who in Mary recognizes herself, her vocation and her own mission.

Popular piety, which has always focused on Mary, was nourished by biblical and patristic references. The Conciliar text did not of course exhaustively treat the problems concerning the figure of the Mother of God but it constitutes the essential hermeneutic horizon for all further reflection, both theological and more specifically spiritual and pastoral. In addition it represents a valuable point of balance, always necessary, between theological rationality and believing affectivity. The unique figure of the Mother of God must be understood and deeply examined from different and complimentary viewpoints: while the *via veritatis* remains ever valid and necessary, one cannot fail to travel the *via pulchritudinis* as well as the *via amoris* in order to discover and contemplate ever more profoundly the crystalline and steadfast faith of Mary, her love for God, her unwavering hope.

For this reason, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, I addressed an invitation to continue along the lines dictated by the Council (cf. n. 27), which I likewise cordially address to you, dear friends and scholars. Make your qualified contribution of reflection and pastoral suggestions to ensure that the upcoming *Year of Faith* may be for all believers in Christ a true moment of grace in which Mary's faith precedes and accompanies us as a luminous beacon and a model of fullness and Christian maturity, to which we may look with trust and from which we may draw enthusiasm and joy in order to live with ever greater commitment and consistency our vocation as children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ, and living members of his Body which is the Church.

I entrust to the Motherly protection of Mary all of you and your commitment to research and I impart to you a special Apostolic Blessing. Many thanks.