



The Holy See

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GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Mary, the Mother of God and our spiritual Mother

1. In directing our gaze to Christ, the Jubilee also invites us to turn our eyes towards Mary. We cannot separate the Son from the Mother, because "being born of Mary" belongs to Jesus' personal identity. In the very first formulas of faith, Jesus is acknowledged as the Son of God and Son of Mary. Tertullian, for example, recalls this when he states: "We must believe in one God, the Almighty, the Creator of the world, and in his Son, Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary" (*De virg. vel.*, 1, 3).

As Mother, Mary was the first human person to rejoice over a birth that marked a new era in the religious history of humanity. From the angel's message she knew what her child's extraordinary destiny would be in the plan of salvation. Mary's joy lies at the root of all Jubilees to come. The Jubilee we are going to celebrate was thus prepared in her maternal heart. For this reason, the Blessed Virgin must be "indirectly" present, so to speak, in dealing with the themes planned throughout the preparatory phase (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 43). Our Jubilee will have to be a sharing in her joy.

2. The inseparability of Christ and Mary comes from the Father's sovereign will in carrying out the plan of the Incarnation. As St Paul says, "when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman" (*Gal 4:4*).

The Father wanted a mother for his incarnate Son, so that he would be born in a truly human way. At the same time, he wanted a virginal mother as a sign of the child's divine sonship.

To make this motherhood a reality, the Father asked Mary for her consent. The angel explained

the divine plan to her and waited for an answer, which had to come from her free will. This can be clearly seen in the Annunciation account, which stresses that Mary posed a question that reveals her intention to remain a virgin. When the angel explained to her that the obstacle would be overcome through the action of the Holy Spirit, she gave her consent.

3. "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (*Lk 1:38*). Mary's acceptance of the divine plan had an immense effect on the whole future of mankind. We can say that the "yes" she expressed at the time of the Annunciation changed the face of the world. It was a "yes" to the coming of the One who was to free human beings from the slavery of sin and win for them the divine life of grace. A future of happiness for the universe was made possible by this "yes" from the young woman of Nazareth.

A wondrous event! The praise that wells up from Elizabeth's heart in the story of the Visitation aptly expresses the joy of all humanity: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (*Lk 1:42*).

4. From the moment of Mary's consent, the mystery of the Incarnation becomes a reality. The Son of God enters our world and begins to live as a man, while remaining fully God. From that moment Mary becomes the *Mother of God*.

This is the highest title that can be given to a creature. It is totally justified in Mary's case, because a mother is mother of the person of her son in the complete fullness of his humanity. Mary is the "Mother of God" inasmuch as she is the Mother of the "Son of God", even if this motherhood is defined in the context of the mystery of the Incarnation.

It was precisely this insight which gave rise to the title of *Theotókos*, Mother of God, in the hearts and on the lips of Christians from the third century. The most ancient prayer addressed to Mary originated in Egypt and asks for her help in difficult circumstances, invoking her as "Mother of God".

Later, when some challenged the legitimacy of this title, the Council of Ephesus solemnly approved it in 431, and its truth has prevailed in doctrinal language and in prayer.

5. By her divine motherhood Mary fully opened her heart to Christ, and in him to all humanity. Mary's total dedication to the work of the Son is especially shown by her participation in his sacrifice. According to John's testimony, the Mother of Jesus "stood by the cross" (*Jn 19:25*). She thus united herself to all the sufferings that Jesus endured. She shared in the generous offering of his sacrifice for the salvation of mankind.

This association with Christ's sacrifice brought about a new motherhood in Mary. She who suffered for all men became the mother of all men. Jesus himself proclaimed this new motherhood

when he said to her from the height of the cross: "Woman, behold, your son" (*Jn* 19:26). Mary thus became the mother of the beloved disciple and, in Jesus' intention, the mother of every disciple, every Christian.

Mary's universal motherhood, intended to foster life according to the Spirit, is an extraordinary gift to humanity from Christ crucified. Jesus said to the beloved disciple: "Behold, your mother". And from that hour he "took her to his own home" (*Jn* 19:27), or better, "among his possessions", among the precious gifts left him by the crucified Master.

The words, "Behold, your mother", are addressed to each of us. We are invited to love Mary as Christ loved her, to welcome her into our lives as our Mother, to let her lead us along the ways of the Holy Spirit.

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

I warmly greet the pilgrims from the parish of Olari, Finland, accompanied by Bishop Paul Verschuren of Helsinki. I extend a special welcome to the Oki Sono Ayako group from Japan and to the members of the Chief Executives Organization from the United States. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Sweden, Finland, Australia, the Philippines, Japan and the United States of America, I invoke the abundant blessings of almighty God.