



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 24 March 2004

Reflection on the Solemnity of the Annunciation

1. Tomorrow we will celebrate the Solemnity of the Annunciation that leads us to contemplate the Incarnation of the Eternal Word made man in Mary's womb. The Virgin's "yes" opened the doors to the implementation of the heavenly Father's saving plan, a plan of redemption for all men and women.

If this feast, which this year falls in the middle of Lent, takes us back, on the one hand, to the beginnings of salvation, it invites us, on the other, to turn our gaze to the Paschal Mystery. Let us look at the crucified Christ who redeemed humanity, obeying the will of the Father to the very end. On Calvary, in the last moments of his life, Jesus entrusted Mary to us as Mother and gave us to her as children.

Since she is associated with the Mystery of the Incarnation, Our Lady shares in the Mystery of the Redemption. Her *fiat*, which we will commemorate tomorrow, echoes that of the Incarnate Word. In close harmony with the *fiat* of Christ and of the Virgin, each one of us is called to say our own "yes" to the mysterious designs of Providence. Indeed, that joy and true peace which all ardently hope for even in our times only springs forth in full acceptance of the divine will.

2. On the eve of this feast which is both Christological and Marian, I am thinking back to several significant moments at the beginning of my Pontificate: to 8 December 1978, when I entrusted the Church and the world to Our Lady at St Mary Major's; and to 4 June the following year, when I renewed this entrustment at the Shrine of Jasna Gora. I am thinking in particular of 25 March 1984, the Holy Year of the Redemption. Twenty years have passed since that day in St Peter's

Square when, spiritually united with all the Bishops of the world who had been "convoked" beforehand, I wanted to *entrust all humanity to the Immaculate Heart of Mary* in response to what Our Lady asked at Fatima.

3. Humanity was then going through difficult times that were giving rise to deep distress and uncertainty. Twenty years later, the world is still frighteningly streaked by hatred, violence, terrorism and war. Among the many victims recorded in the news every day, many are defenceless persons, struck as they go about their duties. On today's *Day dedicated to remembrance and prayer for the "Missionary Martyrs"*, we cannot but recall the priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful who died in mission lands during 2003. So much blood is still being poured out in many parts of the world. It is still urgently necessary for people to open their hearts and to work courageously for reciprocal understanding. The expectation of justice and peace in every part of the earth is always growing greater. How can we respond to this thirst for hope and love other than by turning to Christ, through Mary? I also repeat to the Blessed Virgin today the plea I made to her then.

"Mother of Christ, let there be revealed, once more, in the history of the world the infinite saving power of the Redemption: the power of merciful Love! May it put a stop to evil! May it transform consciences! May your Immaculate Heart reveal for all the light of hope!" (L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 2 April 1984, p. 10).

To special groups

I extend a special welcome to the English-speaking visitors and pilgrims here today, including groups from England, Sweden and the United States of America. May your visit to Rome be a time of spiritual enrichment. Entrusting you to the protection of Mary, I invoke upon you the grace and peace of her Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Lastly, I address a fond greeting to you, dear *young people*, to you, dear *sick people*, and to you, dear *newly-weds*.

May today, the day dedicated to the commemoration of the Missionary Martyrs, be for each one of you a favourable opportunity for rediscovering faith in Christ the one Saviour, and to nourish hope in a more just and fraternal world.
