



# The Holy See

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HOLY MASS FOR PILGRIMS FROM PIACENZA, ITALY

*HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II*

*2 July 1979*

*Beloved in Christ,*

1. This early-morning meeting of ours in this inspiring place which takes us with our minds and our hearts to the Lourdes Grotto, a beloved and blessed place where the Blessed Virgin appeared to little Bernadette, has a very precise meaning. It is a family meeting at the altar of the Lord and under the eyes of the Virgin Mary with the Secretary of State, the new Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, my chief collaborator, with the Bishop and representatives of the priests of his native diocese, Piacenza, and with his relatives and friends.

This is for me a moment of particular joy, which offers me the opportunity to manifest my sentiments of affection and deep appreciation for the one who, after long years of generous dedication spent in the complete and direct service of the Holy See and the Pope, is now invested with the important and serious responsibility of Secretary of State.

I feel the duty to thank Cardinal Casaroli heartily for the solicitude and wisdom with which he expends his energies for the good of the Church and for having accepted this Office, so high and so important; and I call on everyone to accompany him with constant and fervent prayer that the Lord may always be light, help, and comfort for him.

I also congratulate the whole diocese of Piacenza, which, with the serious and loving formation given in its seminaries, has succeeded in giving so many priests and eminent personalities to the service of the Church. I cannot but hope earnestly for more and more numerous and holy priestly vocations in your diocese, for local needs and those of the universal Church.

I address a particularly cordial greeting to Cardinal Casaroli's relatives, assuring them that I share deeply in their sincere joy during these days, so significant and important

2. Starting now from the Word of God, which was read in the liturgy today, let us try to draw from it some good directives for our lives.

There is, in the first place, before our eyes the scene vividly described by the evangelist John: we are on Mount Calvary, there is a cross, and Jesus is nailed to it; and there is, close by, the mother of Jesus, surrounded by some women; there is also the beloved disciple, John himself. The Dying Man speaks, breathing with difficulty in the death agony: "Woman, behold, your son!". And then, addressing the disciple: "Behold, your mother!". The intention is evident: Jesus wants to entrust his mother to the care of his beloved disciple.

Is this all? The ancient Fathers of the Church caught sight of a deeper theological meaning behind this episode, which is apparently so simple. Already Origen identifies the apostle John with every Christian and, after him, the reference to this text becomes more and more frequent, to justify Mary's universal motherhood.

It is a conviction that has a precise foundation in revelation: how can we fail to think, in fact, on reading this passage, of Jesus' mysterious words during the wedding at Cana (cf. Jn 2:4) when, to Mary's request, he replies calling her "woman"—as now—and postponing the beginning of his collaboration with her in favour of men to the moment of the Passion, his "hour", as he is accustomed to call it? (cf. Jn 7:30; 8:20; 12:27; 13:1; Mk 14:35, 41; Mt 26:45; Lk 22:53.)

Mary is fully conscious of the mission which has been entrusted to her: we find her at the beginning of the life of the Church, together with the disciples who are preparing for the imminent event of Pentecost, as the first lesson of the Mass reminds us. In this narration by Luke, her name stands out among those of the other women: the early community, gathered "in the Upper Room" in prayer, presses around her, "the mother of Jesus", as if seeking protection and comfort before the risks of a future overhung by threatening shadows.

3. The example of the Christian community of the beginnings is exemplary. We too, in the events of our time, different though they are, cannot do better than gather around Mary, recognizing in her the Mother of Christ, of the complete Christ, that is, Jesus and the Church, our Mother. And learn from her. What?

*To believe*, in the first place. Mary was called "blessed", because she was able to believe (cf. Lk 1:45). Her faith was the greatest that a human being has ever had; even greater than Abraham's faith. In fact, the "Holy One" who was born of her "moved away from her, as he grew up", rose above her and, withdrawn from her, lived at an infinite distance: to have given birth to him and fed him and seen him in his dependency, and not let herself be dismayed in a cowardly way by his

majesty, but also not to hesitate in her love when her motherly protection was no longer required, and to think about all this that it was right in this way and that God's will was being accomplished; never to get tired, never to lose interest, on the contrary to hold out and take together, step by step, through the force of faith, the path that the person of her Son in his mysterious character is following—this is her greatness" (R. Guardini, *Il Signore*, Milan 1964, pp. 28-29).

And this is also the first lesson she offers us.

Then there is the lesson of prayer: prayer to which they "devoted themselves with one accord" (cf. Acts 1:14). Often in our communities we gather to discuss, to examine situations, to make programmes. This may also be time spent well. But it is necessary to stress that the most useful time, the time which gives meaning and efficacy to discussions and projects, is the time dedicated to prayer. In it, in fact, the soul prepares to receive the "Counsellor" whom Christ promised to send (cf. Jn 15:26) and to whom he entrusted the task of "guiding us into all the truth" (cf. Jn 16:13).

Mary teaches us something else with her example: she tells us that it is necessary *to remain in communion with the hierarchically structured community*. Among the persons gathered in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, St Luke mentions in the first place the eleven Apostles, although he had already given the list of their names in the pages of his Gospel (cf. Lk 6:14 ff.). There is in all this an evident "intention". If before the Resurrection the Apostles were Jesus' special followers, they now appear as men to whom the Risen Christ has entrusted full powers and a mission: it is they, therefore, who are responsible for the work of salvation that the Church must carry out in the world.

Mary is with them: in a certain way she is even subordinated to them. The Christian community is constructed "on the foundation of the apostles". This is Christ's will. Mary, the Mother, accepted it joyfully. From this aspect, too, she became an exemplary model for us.

Now let us continue the celebration of Mass. In this liturgical assembly of ours, the experience of the Upper Room lives again mystically. Mary is with us. We invoke her, we entrust ourselves to her. May she help us in the resolution, which we renew here, to wish to imitate her generously.

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