



The Holy See

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EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER

Kapellplatz, Altötting
Monday, 11 September 2006

My Brother Bishops and Priests!

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

In today's First Reading, Responsorial Psalm and Gospel, three times and in three different ways, we see Mary, the Mother of the Lord, as a woman of prayer. In the *Book of Acts* we find her in the midst of the community of the Apostles gathered in the Upper Room, praying that the Lord, now ascended to the Father, will fulfil his promise: "Within a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (1:5). Mary leads the nascent Church in prayer; she is, as it were in person, the Church at prayer. And thus, along with the great community of the saints and at their centre, she stands even today before God interceding for us, asking her Son to send his Spirit once more upon the Church and to renew the face of the earth.

We responded to this reading by singing with Mary the great hymn of praise which she raises after Elizabeth calls her blessed because of her faith. It is a prayer of thanksgiving, of joy in God, of blessing for his mighty works. The tenor of this song is clear from its very first words: "My soul magnifies - makes great - the Lord". Making the Lord great means giving him a place in the world, in our lives, and letting him enter into our time and our activity: ultimately this is the essence of true prayer. Where God is made great, men and women are not made small: there too men and women become great and the world is filled with light.

Finally, in the Gospel passage, Mary makes a request of her Son on behalf of some friends in need. At first sight, this could appear to be an entirely human conversation between a Mother and her Son and it is indeed a dialogue rich in humanity. Yet Mary does not speak to Jesus as if he were a mere man on whose ability and helpfulness she can count. She entrusts a human need to his power B to a power which is more than skill and human ability. In this dialogue with Jesus, we actually see her as a Mother who asks, one who intercedes. As we listen to this Gospel passage, it is worth going a little deeper, not only to understand Jesus and Mary better, but also to learn from Mary the right way to pray. Mary does not really ask something of Jesus: she simply says to him: "They have no wine" (*Jn* 2:3). Weddings in the Holy Land were celebrated for a whole week; the entire town took part, and consequently much wine was consumed. Now the bride and groom find themselves in trouble, and Mary simply says this to Jesus. She doesn't ask for anything specific, much less that Jesus exercise his power, perform a miracle, produce wine. She simply hands the matter over to Jesus and leaves it to him to decide about what to do. In the simple words of the Mother of Jesus, then, we can see two things: on the one hand her affectionate concern for people, that maternal affection which makes her aware of the problems of others. We see her heartfelt goodness and her willingness to help. This is the Mother that generations of people have come here to Altötting to visit. To her we entrust our cares, our needs and our troubles. Her maternal readiness to help, in which we trust, appears here for the first time in the Holy Scriptures. But in addition to this first aspect, with which we are all familiar, there is another, which we could easily overlook: Mary leaves everything to the Lord's judgement. At Nazareth she gave over her will, immersing it in the will of God: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (*Lk* 1:38). And this continues to be her fundamental attitude. This is how she teaches us to pray: not by seeking to assert before God our own will and our own desires, however important they may be, however reasonable they might appear to us, but rather to bring them before him and to let him decide what he intends to do. From Mary we learn graciousness and readiness to help, but we also learn humility and generosity in accepting God's will, in the confident conviction that, whatever it may be, it will be our, and my own, true good.

We can understand, I think, very well the attitude and words of Mary, yet we still find it very hard to understand Jesus' answer. In the first place, we don't like the way he addresses her: "Woman". Why doesn't he say: "Mother"? But this title really expresses Mary's place in salvation history. It points to the future, to the hour of the crucifixion, when Jesus will say to her: "Woman, behold your son B Son, behold your mother" (cf. *Jn* 19:26-27). It anticipates the hour when he will make the woman, his Mother, the Mother of all his disciples. On the other hand, the title "Woman" recalls the account of the creation of Eve: Adam, surrounded by creation in all its magnificence, experiences loneliness as a human being. Then Eve is created, and in her Adam finds the companion whom he longed for; and he gives her the name "woman". In the *Gospel of John*, then, Mary represents the new, the definitive woman, the companion of the Redeemer, our Mother: the name, which seemed so lacking in affection, actually expresses the grandeur of Mary's enduring mission.

Yet we like even less what Jesus at Cana then says to Mary: "Woman, what have I to do with you?"

My hour has not yet come” (*Jn 2:4*). We want to object: you have a lot to do with her! It was Mary who gave you flesh and blood, who gave you your body, and not only your body: with the “yes” which rose from the depths of her heart she bore you in her womb and with a mother's love she gave you life and introduced you to the community of the people of Israel. But if this is how we speak to Jesus, then we are already well along the way towards understanding his answer. Because all this should remind us that at the incarnation of Jesus two dialogues took place; the two go together and blend into one. First, there is Mary’s dialogue with the Archangel Gabriel, where she says: “Let it be with me according to your word” (*Lk 1:38*). But there is a text parallel to this, so to speak, within God himself, which we read about in the *Letter to the Hebrews*, when it says that the words of *Psalms* 40 became a kind of dialogue between the Father and the Son B a dialogue which set in motion the Incarnation. The Eternal Son says to the Father: “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me ... See, I have come to do your will” (*Heb 10:5-7*; cf. *Ps 40:6-8*). The “yes” of the Son: “I have come to do your will”, and the “yes” of Mary: “Let it be with me according to your word” B this double “yes” B becomes a single “yes”, and thus the Word becomes flesh in Mary. In this double “yes” the obedience of the Son is embodied, and by her own “yes” Mary gives him that body. “Woman, what have I to do with you?” Ultimately, what each has to do with the other is found in this double “yes” which resulted in the Incarnation. The Lord’s answer points to this point of profound unity. It is precisely to this that he points his Mother. Here, in their common “yes” to the will of the Father, an answer is found. We too need to learn always anew how to progress towards this point; there we will find the answer to our questions.

If we take this as our starting-point, we can now also understand the second part of Jesus' answer: “My hour has not yet come”. Jesus never acts completely alone, and never for the sake of pleasing others. The Father is always the starting-point of his actions, and this is what unites him to Mary, because she wished to make her request in this same unity of will with the Father. And so, surprisingly, after hearing Jesus' answer, which apparently refuses her request, she can simply say to the servants: “Do whatever he tells you” (*Jn 2:5*). Jesus is not a wonder-worker, he does not play games with his power in what is, after all, a private affair. No, he gives a sign, in which he proclaims his hour, the hour of the wedding-feast, the hour of union between God and man. He does not merely “make” wine, but transforms the human wedding-feast into an image of the divine wedding-feast, to which the Father invites us through the Son and in which he gives us every good thing, represented by the abundance of wine. The wedding-feast becomes an image of that moment when Jesus pushed love to the utmost, let his body be rent and thus gave himself to us for ever, having become completely one with us - a marriage between God and man. The hour of the Cross, the hour which is the source of the Sacrament, in which he gives himself really to us in flesh and blood, puts his Body into our hands and our hearts, this is the hour of the wedding feast. Thus a momentary need is resolved in a truly divine manner and the initial request is superabundantly granted. Jesus' hour has not yet arrived, but in the sign of the water changed into wine, in the sign of the festive gift, he even now anticipates that hour.

Jesus' "hour" is the Cross; his definitive hour will be his return at the end of time. He continually anticipates also this definitive hour in the Eucharist, in which, even now, he always comes to us. And he does this ever anew through the intercession of his Mother, through the intercession of the Church, which cries out to him in the Eucharistic prayers: "Come, Lord Jesus!". In the Canon of the Mass, the Church constantly prays for this "hour" to be anticipated, asking that he may come even now and be given to us. And so we want to let ourselves be guided by Mary, by the Mother of Graces of Altötting, by the Mother of all the faithful, towards the "hour" of Jesus. Let us ask him for the gift of a deeper knowledge and understanding of him. And may our reception of him not be reduced to the moment of communion alone. Jesus remains present in the sacred Host and he awaits us constantly. Here in Altötting, the adoration of the Lord in the Eucharist has found a new location in the old treasury. Mary and Jesus go together. Through Mary we want to continue our converse with the Lord and to learn how to receive him better. Holy Mother of God, pray for us, just as at Cana you prayed for the bride and the bridegroom! Guide us towards Jesus - ever anew! Amen!

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