



The Holy See

HOLY MASS ON THE SOLEMNITY
OF THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

St Thomas of Villanova Parish, Castel Gandolfo

Wednesday, 15 August 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In his great work *De Civitate Dei*, St Augustine says once that the whole of human history, the history of the world, is a struggle between two loves: love of God to the point of losing oneself, of total self-giving, and love of oneself to the point of despising God, of hating others. This same interpretation of history as a struggle between two loves, between love and selfishness, also appears in the reading from the Book of Revelation that we have just heard.

Here, these two loves appear in two great figures. First of all, there is the immensely strong, red dragon with a striking and disturbing manifestation of power without grace, without love, of absolute selfishness, terror and violence.

At the time when St John wrote the Book of Revelation, this dragon represented for him the power of the anti-Christian Roman Emperors, from Nero to Domitian. This power seemed boundless; the military, political and propagandist power of the Roman Empire was such that before it, faith, the Church, appeared as a defenceless woman with no chance of survival and even less of victory.

Who could stand up to this omnipresent force that seemed capable of achieving everything? Yet, we know that in the end it was the defenceless woman who won and not egoism or hatred; the love of God triumphed and the Roman Empire was opened to the Christian faith.

The words of Sacred Scripture always transcend the period in history. Thus, not only does this

dragon suggest the anti-Christian power of the persecutors of the Church of that time, but also anti-Christian dictatorships of all periods.

We see this power, the force of the red dragon, brought into existence once again in the great dictatorships of the last century: the Nazi dictatorship and the dictatorship of Stalin monopolized all the power, penetrated every corner, the very last corner. It seemed impossible in the long term that faith could survive in the face of this dragon that was so powerful, that could not wait to devour God become a Child, as well as the woman, the Church. But also in this case, in the end love was stronger than hate.

Today too, the dragon exists in new and different ways. It exists in the form of materialistic ideologies that tell us it is absurd to think of God; it is absurd to observe God's commandments: they are a leftover from a time past. Life is only worth living for its own sake. Take everything we can get in this brief moment of life. Consumerism, selfishness and entertainment alone are worthwhile. This is life. This is how we must live. And once again, it seems absurd, impossible, to oppose this dominant mindset with all its media and propagandist power. Today too, it seems impossible to imagine a God who created man and made himself a Child and who was to be the true ruler of the world.

Even now, this dragon appears invincible, but it is still true today that God is stronger than the dragon, that it is love which conquers rather than selfishness.

Having thus considered the various historical forms of the dragon, let us now look at the other image: the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, surrounded by 12 stars. This is also a multidimensional image.

Without any doubt, a first meaning is that it is Our Lady, Mary, clothed with the sun, that is, with God, totally; Mary who lives totally in God, surrounded and penetrated by God's light. Surrounded by the 12 stars, that is, by the 12 tribes of Israel, by the whole People of God, by the whole Communion of Saints; and at her feet, the moon, the image of death and mortality.

Mary has left death behind her; she is totally clothed in life, she is taken up body and soul into God's glory and thus, placed in glory after overcoming death, she says to us: Take heart, it is love that wins in the end!

The message of my life was: I am the handmaid of God, my life has been a gift of myself to God and my neighbour. And this life of service now arrives in real life. May you too have trust and have the courage to live like this, countering all the threats of the dragon.

This is the first meaning of the woman whom Mary succeeded in being. The "woman clothed with the sun" is the great sign of the victory of love, of the victory of goodness, of the victory of God; a

great sign of consolation.

Yet, this woman who suffered, who had to flee, who gave birth with cries of anguish, is also the Church, the pilgrim Church of all times. In all generations she has to give birth to Christ anew, to bring him very painfully into the world, with great suffering. Persecuted in all ages, it is almost as if, pursued by the dragon, she had gone to live in the wilderness.

However, in all ages, the Church, the People of God, also lives by the light of God and as the Gospel says is nourished by God, nourishing herself with the Bread of the Holy Eucharist. Thus, in all the trials in the various situations of the Church through the ages in different parts of the world, she wins through suffering. And she is the presence, the guarantee of God's love against all the ideologies of hatred and selfishness.

We see of course that today too the dragon wants to devour God who made himself a Child. Do not fear for this seemingly frail God; the fight has already been won. Today too, this weak God is strong: he is true strength.

Thus, the Feast of the Assumption is an invitation to trust in God and also to imitate Mary in what she herself said: Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; I put myself at the Lord's disposal.

This is the lesson: one should travel on one's own road; one should give life and not take it. And precisely in this way each one is on the journey of love which is the loss of self, but this losing of oneself is in fact the only way to truly find oneself, to find true life.

Let us look to Mary, taken up into Heaven. Let us be encouraged to celebrate the joyful feast with faith: God wins. Faith, which seems weak, is the true force of the world. Love is stronger than hate.

And let us say with Elizabeth: Blessed are you among women. Let us pray to you with all the Church: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

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