



The Holy See

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

44th WORLD DAY OF PEACE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Vatican Basilica

Saturday, 1st January 2011

(Video)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Still immersed in the spiritual atmosphere of Christmas, in which we have contemplated the mystery of Christ's birth, today we are celebrating the Virgin Mary, whom the Church venerates as Mother of God with the same sentiments since she gave flesh to the Son of the Eternal Father. The biblical Readings of this Solemnity put the emphasis mainly on the Son of God made man and on the "Name" of the Lord. The First Reading presents to us the solemn Blessing that the priests pronounced over the Israelites on the great religious feasts: it is marked, precisely, by the Name of the Lord, repeated three times, as if to express the fullness and power that derive from this invocation. This text of liturgical Blessing, in fact, calls to mind the riches of grace and peace that God gives to man, with a benevolent attitude to him, and which is expressed by the "shining" of the divine face and his "turning" it to us.

Today the Church listens once again to these words, while she asks the Lord to bless the New Year that has just begun, in the awareness that in the face of the tragic events that mark history, in the face of the logistics of war that unfortunately have not yet been fully overcome, God alone can move the human spirit in its depths and assure hope and peace to humanity. By now it is a firm tradition, on the first day of the year that, the Church throughout the world raise a unanimous prayer to invoke peace. It is good to begin a new stretch of the journey by setting out with determination on the path of peace. Today let us respond to the cry of so many men, women, children and elderly people who are the victims of war, which is the most appalling and violent face

of history. Let us pray today that peace, which the Angels announced to the shepherds on Christmas night, may reach everywhere: *“super terram pax in hominibus bonae voluntatis”* (Lk 2:14). For this reason, especially with our prayers, we wish to help every person and every people, in particular all those who have the responsibility of government, to walk with ever greater determination on the path of peace.

In the Second Reading St Paul sums up in the adoption as sons the work of salvation brought about by Christ in which the figure of Mary is honoured. Thanks to her the Son of God, “born of woman” (Gal 4:4), was able to come into the world as a real man, in the fullness of time. This fulfilment, this fullness, concerns the past and the messianic expectations, which were brought about, but at the same time also refers to fullness in the absolute sense: in the Word made flesh, God said his ultimate and definitive word. Thus on the threshold of a new year, the invitation to walk joyfully towards the light of the “day that shall dawn... from on high” (Lk 1:78) resounds in this way, because in the Christian perspective all time is inhabited by God, there is no future that is not oriented to Christ and no fullness exists outside that of Christ.

Today’s Gospel passage ends with the imposition of the Name of Jesus, while Mary participates in silence, meditating in her heart upon the mystery of this Son of hers who in a completely unique way is a gift of God. But the Gospel passage we have heard particularly highlights the shepherds who returned “glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen” (Lk 2:20). The Angel had announced to them that in the city of David, that is, Bethlehem, the Saviour was born and that they would find the sign: a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger (cf. Lk 2:11-12). Having left in haste, they had found Mary and Joseph and the Child. Let us note that the Evangelist speaks of Mary’s motherhood starting with the Son, with that “babe wrapped in swaddling clothes”, because it is he — the Word of God (Jn 1:14) — who is the reference point, the centre of the event that is being brought about, and it is he who ensures that Mary’s motherhood is described as “divine”.

This priority attention that today’s Readings pay to the “Son”, to Jesus, does not lessen the Mother’s role, on the contrary, it puts it in the right perspective: Mary, in fact, is the true Mother of God precisely by virtue of her total relationship to Christ. Therefore, in glorifying the Son one honours the Mother and in honouring the Mother one glorifies the Son. The title of “Mother of God” which the Liturgy highlights today, stresses the unique mission of the Blessed Virgin in the history of salvation: a mission that is at the root of the worship and devotion which the Christian people reserve for her. Indeed, Mary did not receive God’s gift for herself alone, but in order to bring him into the world: in her fruitful virginity, God gave men and women the gifts of eternal salvation (cf. *Collect*). And Mary continually offers her mediation to the People of God, on pilgrimage through history towards eternity, just as she once offered it to the shepherds of Bethlehem. She, who gave earthly life to the Son of God, continues to give human beings divine life, which is Jesus himself and his Holy Spirit. For this reason she is considered the Mother of every human being who is born to Grace and at the same time is invoked as Mother of the Church.

It is in the name of Mary, Mother of God and of men, that since 1 January 1968 the World Day of Peace has been celebrated throughout the world. Peace is a gift of God, as we heard in the First Reading: May “the Lord... give you peace” (Nm 6:26). It is a messianic gift par excellence, the first fruit of the love that Jesus gave us, it is our reconciliation and pacification with God. Peace is also a human value to be achieved at the social and political levels, but it is rooted in the mystery of Christ (cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, nn. 77-90).

In this solemn celebration, on the occasion of the 44th World Day of Peace, I am glad to address my respectful greeting to the distinguished Ambassadors to the Holy See, with my best wishes for their mission. Then a cordial brotherly greeting goes to my Secretary of State and to the Heads of the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, with a special thought for the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and for his collaborators. I would like to express to them my deep gratitude for their daily commitment to promote peaceful coexistence among the peoples and arouse an ever deeper awareness of peace in the Church and in the world. In this perspective, the ecclesial community is ever more committed to working, in accordance with the instructions of the Magisterium, to provide a reliable spiritual patrimony of values and principles in the continuous quest for peace.

I wished to recall in *my Message for today's Day*, entitled “Religious freedom, the path to peace”: “The world needs God. It needs universal, shared ethical and spiritual values, and religion can offer a precious contribution to their pursuit, for the building of a just and peaceful social order at the national and international levels” (n. 15). I therefore stressed that “religious freedom... is an essential element of a constitutional State; it cannot be denied without at the same time encroaching on all fundamental rights and freedoms, since it is their synthesis and keystone” (n. 5).

Humanity cannot appear to be resigned to the negative power of selfishness and violence; it must not become accustomed to conflicts that claim victims and jeopardize the future of peoples. Before the threatening tensions of the moment and, especially, before the discrimination, abuse and religious intolerance that today are striking Christians in particular (cf. *ibid.*, n. 1), I once again address a pressing invitation not to give in to discouragement and resignation. I urge everyone to pray so that the efforts made by various parties to promote and build peace in the world may be successful. For this difficult task words do not suffice; what is needed is the practical and constant effort of the leaders of Nations, and it is necessary above all that every person be motivated by the authentic spirit of peace, to be implored ever anew in prayer and to be lived in daily relations in every environment.

In this Eucharistic celebration we have before our eyes, for our veneration, the image of Our Lady of the Sacro Monte di Viggiano, so dear to the peoples of Basilicata. May the Virgin Mary give us her Son, may she show us the Face of her Son, the Prince of Peace. May she help us to remain in

the light of this face that shines upon us (cf. Nm 6:25), in order to rediscover all the tenderness of God the Father; may it be she who supports us in invoking the Holy Spirit, so that he will renew the face of the earth and transform hearts, dissolving their hardness in the face of the disarming goodness of the Child who was born for us. May the Mother of God accompany us in this New Year; may she obtain for us and for the whole world the desired gift of peace.

Amen.

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