



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO MEXICO AND THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA

(MARCH 23-29, 2012)

**HOLY MASS FOR THE 400th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE DISCOVERY OF THE IMAGE
OF THE "VIRGEN DE LA CARIDAD DEL COBRE"**

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Santiago de Cuba, Plaza Antonio Maceo Square

Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

Monday, 26 March 2012

[Video]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I give thanks to God who has allowed me to come to you and to make this much anticipated trip. I greet Bishop Dionisio García Ibáñez, Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, and I thank him for his warm words of welcome offered on behalf of everyone. I greet the Bishops of Cuba and those who have come from elsewhere, and the priests, religious men and women, seminarians and lay faithful present for this celebration. I cannot forget all those who, for reasons of illness, advanced age or for other motives, are not able to join us. I also greet the civil Authorities who have graciously wished to join us.

This first Holy Mass which I have the joy of celebrating during my pastoral visit to this country, takes place in the context of the Marian Jubilee Year called to honour and to venerate Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre, Patroness of Cuba, in this fourth centenary of the discovery and presence of

her venerable statue in this blessed land. I cannot forget the sacrifices and the dedication with which this jubilee has been prepared, especially spiritually. I was deeply touched to hear of the fervour with which Mary has been welcomed and invoked by so many Cubans during her journey to every corner of the island.

These important events in the Church in Cuba take on a special lustre because of the feast celebrated today throughout the universal Church: the Annunciation of the Lord to the Virgin Mary. The Incarnation of the Son of God is the central mystery of the Christian faith, and in it Mary occupies a central place. But, we ask, what is the meaning of this mystery? And, what importance does it have for our concrete lives?

First of all, let us see what the Incarnation means. In the Gospel of Saint Luke we heard the words of the angel to Mary: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (*Lk* 1:35). In Mary, the Son of God is made man, fulfilling in this way the prophecy of Isaiah: "Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel, which means 'God-with-us'" (*Is* 7:14). Jesus, the Word made flesh, is truly God-with-us, who has come to live among us and to share our human condition. The Apostle Saint John expresses it in the following way: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (*Jn* 1:14). The expression, "became flesh" points to our human reality in most concrete and tangible way. In Christ, God has truly come into the world, he has entered into our history, he has set his dwelling among us, thus fulfilling the deepest desire of human beings that the world may truly become a home worthy of humanity. On the other hand, when God is put aside, the world becomes an inhospitable place for man, and frustrates creation's true vocation to be a space for the covenant, for the "Yes" to the love between God and humanity who responds to him. Mary did so as the first fruit of believers with her unreserved "Yes" to the Lord.

For this reason, contemplating the mystery of the Incarnation, we cannot fail to turn our eyes to her so as to be filled with wonder, gratitude and love at seeing how our God, coming into the world, wished to depend upon the free consent of one of his creatures. Only from the moment when the Virgin responded to the angel, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (*Lk* 1:38), did the eternal Word of the Father begin his human existence in time. It is touching to see how God not only respects human freedom: he almost seems to require it. And we see also how the beginning of the earthly life of the Son of God was marked by a double "Yes" to the saving plan of the Father - that of Christ and that of Mary. This obedience to God is what opens the doors of the world to the truth, to salvation. God has created us as the fruit of his infinite love; hence, to live in accordance with his will is the way to encounter our genuine identity, the truth of our being, while apart from God we are alienated from ourselves and are hurled into the void. The obedience of faith is true liberty, authentic redemption, which allows us to unite ourselves to the love of Jesus in his determination to conform himself to the will of the Father. Redemption is always this process of the lifting up of the human will to full communion with

the divine will (cf. [Lectio Divina with the parish priests of Rome](#), 18 February 2010).

Dear brothers and sisters, today we praise the Most Holy Virgin for her faith, and with Saint Elizabeth we too say, "Blessed is she who believed" (*Lk* 1:45). As Saint Augustine said, Mary conceived Christ by faith in her heart before she conceived him physically in her womb; Mary believed and what she believed was came to be in her (cf. *Sermo* 215, 4: *PL* 38, 1074). Let us ask the Lord to strengthen our faith, to make it active and fruitful in love. Let us implore him that, like her, we may welcome the word of God into our hearts, and carry it out with docility and constancy.

The Virgin Mary, by her unique role in the mystery of Christ, represents the exemplar and model of the Church. The Church, like the Mother of Christ, is also called to embrace in herself the mystery of God who comes to live in her. Dear brothers and sisters, I know with what effort, boldness and self-sacrifice you work every day so that, in the concrete circumstances of your country, and at this moment in history, the Church will better present her true face as a place in which God draws near and encounters humanity. The Church, the living body of Christ, has the mission of prolonging on earth the salvific presence of God, of opening the world to something greater than itself, to the love and the light of God. It is worth the effort, dear brothers and sisters, to devote your entire life to Christ, to grow in his friendship each day and to feel called to proclaim the beauty and the goodness of his life to every person, to all our brothers and sisters. I encourage you in this task of sowing the word of God in the world and offering to everyone the true nourishment of the body of Christ. Easter is already approaching; let us determine to follow Jesus without fear or doubts on his journey to the Cross. May we accept with patience and faith whatever opposition or affliction may come, with the conviction that, in his Resurrection, he has crushed the power of evil which darkens everything, and has brought the dawn of a new world, the world of God, of light, of truth and happiness. The Lord will not fail to bless with abundant fruits the generosity of your commitment.

The mystery of the Incarnation, in which God draws near to us, also shows us the incomparable dignity of every human life. In his loving plan, from the beginning of creation, God has entrusted to the family founded on matrimony the most lofty mission of being the fundamental cell of society and an authentic domestic church. With this certainty, you, dear husbands and wives, are called to be, especially for your children, a real and visible sign of the love of Christ for the Church. Cuba needs the witness of your fidelity, your unity, your capacity to welcome human life, especially that of the weakest and most needy.

Dear brothers and sisters, before the gaze of Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre, I appeal to you to reinvigorate your faith, that you may live in Christ and for Christ, and armed with peace, forgiveness and understanding, that you may strive to build a renewed and open society, a better society, one more worthy of humanity, and which better reflects the goodness of God. Amen.

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