



The Holy See

MARIAN VIGIL FOR THE CONCLUSION OF THE MONTH OF MAY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

St Peter's Square

Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Saturday, 31 May 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We conclude the month of May with this evocative Marian prayer meeting. I greet you with affection and I thank you for your participation. In the first place I greet Cardinal Angelo Comastri; with him I greet the other Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops and priests, who have come to this evening celebration. I extend my greeting to the consecrated persons and to all of you, dear lay faithful, who, with your presence have wished to honour the Most Holy Virgin.

Today we are celebrating the Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin and the memory of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Therefore, everything invites us to turn our trusting glance to Mary. To her, also this evening, we addressed the ancient and ever actual pious practice of the Rosary. The Rosary, when it is not a mechanical, traditional form of repetition, is a Biblical meditation that allows us to trace the events of the Lord's life in the company of the Blessed Virgin, pondering them, like her, in our heart. In many Christian communities during the month of May there is the beautiful custom of reciting the Holy Rosary in a more solemn way in families and in parishes. Now, that the month is ending, may this good habit continue. Rather, may it continue with more commitment so that, at the school of Mary, the lamp of faith may shine ever more in the hearts and homes of Christians.

In today's Feast of the Visitation the liturgy has us listen again to Luke's Gospel passage that recounts Mary of Nazareth's journey to the home of her elderly cousin Elizabeth. Let us imagine the Virgin's state of mind after the Annunciation, when the Angel left her. Mary found herself with a great mystery enclosed within her womb; she knew something extraordinarily unique had

happened; she was aware that the last chapter of salvation history in the world had begun. But everything around her remained as before and the village of Nazareth was completely unaware of what had happened to her.

Before worrying about herself, Mary instead thought about elderly Elizabeth, who she knew was well on in her pregnancy and, moved by the mystery of love that she had just welcomed within herself, she set out "in haste" to go to offer Elizabeth her help. This is the simple and sublime greatness of Mary! When she reaches Elizabeth's house, an event takes place that no artist could ever portray with the beauty and the intensity with which it took place. The interior light of the Holy Spirit enfolds their persons. And Elizabeth, enlightened from on high, exclaims: *"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord"* (Lk 1: 42-45).

These words could appear to us out of proportion with respect to the real context. Elizabeth is one of the many elderly people in Israel and Mary is an unknown young woman from a lost village of Galilee. What can this be and what can they accomplish in a world where other people count and other powers hold sway. Yet, once again Mary amazes us; her heart is limpid, totally open to God's light. Her soul is without sin, it is not weighed down by pride or selfishness. Elizabeth's words enkindle in her spirit a canticle of praise, which is an authentic and profound "theological" reading of history: a reading that we must continually learn from the one whose faith is without shadow and without wrinkle. *"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord"*. Mary recognizes God's greatness. This is the first indispensable sentiment of faith. It is the sentiment that gives security to human creatures and frees from fear, even in the midst of the tempest of history.

Going beyond the surface, Mary "sees" the work of God in history with the eyes of faith. This is why she is blessed, because she believed. By faith, in fact, she accepted the Word of the Lord and conceived the Incarnate Word. Her faith has shown her that the thrones of the powerful of this world are all temporary, while God's throne is the only rock that does not change or fall. Her *Magnificat*, at the distance of centuries and millennia, remains the truest and most profound interpretation of history, while the interpretations of so many of this world's wise have been belied by events in the course of the centuries.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us return home with the *Magnificat* in our heart. Let us bring the same sentiments of praise and thanksgiving of Mary to the Lord, her faith and her hope, her docile abandonment in the hands of Divine Providence. May we imitate her example of readiness and generosity in the service of our brethren. Indeed, only by accepting God's love and making of our existence a selfless and generous service to our neighbour, can we joyfully lift a song of praise to the Lord. May the Blessed Mother, who invites us this evening to find refuge in her Immaculate Heart, obtain this grace for us.

My Blessing to you all.

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