



The Holy See

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EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II *Mexico, Basilica of Our Lady of Zapopán*

Tuesday, 30 January 1979

Beloved Brothers and Sisters, 1. Here we are gathered today in this beautiful sanctuary of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception of Zapopán, in the great archdiocese of Guadalajara. I did not want to, nor could I, omit this meeting, around the altar of Jesus and at the feet of Most Holy Mary, with the People of God on pilgrimage to this place. This sanctuary of Zapopán is, in fact, another proof, a tangible and consoling one, of the intense devotion that the Mexican people, and with it the whole Latin-American people, has professed to Mary Immaculate for centuries. Like the Guadalupe sanctuary, this one, too, comes from the colonial age. Like the former, its origins go back to the precious evangelization effort of missionaries (in this case, the sons of St Francis) among the "Indios", so well disposed to receive the message of salvation in Christ and to venerate his holy Mother, conceived without the stain of sin. Thus these peoples perceive the unique and exceptional place of Mary in the fulfilment of God's plan (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 53 f.), her eminent holiness, and her motherly relationship with us (*ibid.* 61, 66). From that moment onwards, she, Mary Immaculate, represented in this simple little image, is incorporated in the popular piety of the people of the Archdiocese of Guadalajara, in that of the Mexican nation and of the whole of Latin America. As Mary herself says prophetically in the canticle of the Magnificat, "All generations will call me blessed" (Lk 1:48). 2. If this is true of the whole of the Catholic world, how much more it is in Mexico and in Latin America! It can be said that faith and devotion to Mary and to her mysteries belong to the very identity of these peoples, and characterize their popular piety, of which my predecessor Paul VI spoke in the apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (n. 48). This popular piety is not necessarily a vague sentiment, lacking a solid doctrinal basis, a kind of inferior form of religious manifestation. How often it is, on the contrary, the true expression of the soul of a people, since it is touched by grace and forged by the happy meeting between the work of evangelization

and that of local culture, of which the aforesaid Exhortation also spoke (n. 20)! Thus guided and sustained and, if necessary, purified, by the constant action of pastors, and exercised every day in the life of the people, popular piety is really the piety "of the poor and the simple" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 48). It is the way in which these favourites of the Lord live and express, in their human attitudes and in all the dimensions of life, the mystery of the faith that they have received. This popular piety, in Mexico and in the whole of Latin America, is indissolubly Marian. In it, Most Holy Mary occupies the same preeminent place that she has in Christian faith as a whole. She is the mother, the queen, the protectress and the model. People come to her to honour her, to ask for her intercession, to learn to imitate her, that is, to learn to be real disciples of Jesus. For, as the Lord himself says, "whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mk 3:35). Far from overshadowing the irreplaceable and unique mediation of Christ, this function of Mary, accepted by popular piety, highlights it and "rather shows its power", as the Second Vatican Council teaches (*Lumen Gentium*, 60); because everything she is and has "flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on his mediation" and leads to him (*ibid.*). The faithful who come to this sanctuary are well aware of this and put it into practice, always saying with her, looking to God the Father, in the gift of his beloved Son, made present among us by the Spirit: "My soul magnifies the Lord" (Lk 1:46).³ Precisely, when the faithful come to this sanctuary, as I, too, a pilgrim in this Mexican land, wished to come today, what else do they do but praise and honour God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in the figure of Mary, who is united by indissoluble ties to the three persons of the Holy Trinity, as the Second Vatican Council also teaches? (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 53). Our visit to the Zapopán sanctuary, mine today, yours so many times, signifies in itself the will and the effort to approach God and to let oneself be submerged by him, by means of the intercession, the aid, and the model of Mary. In these places of grace, so characteristic of the Mexican and Latin-American religious area, the People of God, convened in the Church, with its Pastors, and on this happy occasion with the one who humbly presides in the Church over charity (cf. Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Rom.* prol.), gathers around the altar, under Mary's motherly gaze, to bear witness that what counts in this world and in human life is the opening to the gift of God which is communicated in Jesus, our Saviour, and which comes to us through Mary. It is this that gives our earthly existence its true transcendent dimension, as God willed from the beginning, and as Jesus Christ restored with his death and resurrection, and as shines forth in the Virgin Mary. She is the refuge of sinners ("refugium peccatorum"). The people of God is aware of its own condition of sin. For this reason, knowing that it needs constant purification, it "follows constantly the path of penance and renewal" (*Lumen Gentium*, 8). Each of us is aware of this. Jesus looked for sinners: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Lk 5:31-32). Before curing the man who was paralysed, he said to him: "Man, your sins are forgiven you." (Lk 5:20); and to a woman who had sinned: "Go, and do not sin again" (Jn 8:11). If we are oppressed by awareness of sin, we instinctively seek him who has the power to forgive sins (cf. Lk 5:24), and we seek him through Mary whose sanctuaries are places of conversion, penance, and reconciliation with God. She awakens in us the hope of mending our ways and persevering in good, even if that may sometimes seem humanly impossible. She enables us to overcome the multiple "structures of sin"

in which our personal, family, and social life is wrapped. She enables us to obtain the grace of true liberation, with that freedom with which Christ liberated every man.⁴ From here starts too, as from its true source, the authentic commitment for other men, our brothers, especially for the poorest and neediest ones, and for the necessary transformation of society. For this is what God wants from us, and it is to this that he sends us, with the voice and the strength of his Gospel, on making us responsible for one another. Mary, as my predecessor Paul VI teaches in the apostolic exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (n. 37), is also a model, the faithful accomplisher of God's will, for those who do not accept passively the adverse circumstances of personal and social life, and are not victims of "alienation" — as is said today — but who with her proclaim that God is "the avenger of the humble" and, if necessary, "puts down the mighty from their thrones", to quote the Magnificat again (cf. Lk 1:51-53). For, in this way she is "the type of Christ's perfect disciple who is the architect of the earthly and temporal city, but who, at the same time, aims at the heavenly and eternal city; who promotes justice, liberates the needy, but, above all, bears witness to that active love which constructs Christ in souls" (*Marialis Cultus*, 37). This is Mary Immaculate for us in this sanctuary of Zapopán. This is what we have come to learn from her today, in order that she may always be for these faithful of Guadalajara, for the Mexican nation, and for the whole of Latin-America, with its Christian and Catholic being, the real "star of evangelization".⁵ But I do not want to end this talk without adding some words which I consider important in the context of that which I have just indicated. This sanctuary of Zapopán, and so many others scattered all over Mexico and Latin-America, where millions of pilgrims come every year with a deep sense of religiousness, can, and must, be privileged places to find an increasingly purified faith which will lead them to Christ. For this reason, it will be necessary to take great and zealous care over the apostolate in Marian sanctuaries; by means of a suitable and living liturgy; by means of assiduous preaching and sound catechesis; by means of concern for the ministry of the sacrament of Penance; by the prudent purification of any forms of religiousness that present less suitable elements. It is necessary to take advantage pastorally of these opportunities, sporadic ones, perhaps, of meeting souls that are not always faithful to the whole programme of a Christian life — but who come led by a vision of faith that is sometimes incomplete — in order to try to lead them to the centre of all sound piety, Christ Jesus, the Saviour, Son of God. In this way popular religiousness will be perfected, when necessary, and Marian devotion will take on its full significance in a Trinitarian, Christocentric and ecclesial direction, as the exhortation *Marialis Cultus* so opportunely teaches (n. 25-27). I call upon the priests in charge of the sanctuaries, and those who guide the pilgrims to them, to reflect carefully on the great good they can do the faithful if they succeed in setting up a suitable system of evangelization. Do not miss any opportunity to preach Christ, to enlighten the faith of the people and to strengthen it; helping the people on its way towards the Holy Trinity. Let Mary be the way. May Mary Immaculate of Zapopán help you to do so. Amen.

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