



The Holy See

CONCLUSION OF THE MARIAN MONTH OF MAY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Lourdes Grotto, Vatican Gardens

Monday, 31 May 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I join you with great joy at the end of this traditional prayer meeting which concludes the month of May in the Vatican. With reference to today's liturgy, let us contemplate Mary Most Holy in the mystery of her Visitation. We recognize in the Virgin Mary who goes to visit her kinswoman Elizabeth the clearest example and the truest meaning of our journey as believers and of the journey of the Church herself. The Church is missionary by her very nature, she is called to proclaim the Gospel everywhere and always and to pass on the faith to every man and woman, and to every culture.

"In those days", wrote St Luke the Evangelist, "Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah" (Lk 1: 39). Mary's is a real missionary journey. It leads her far from home, impels her into the world to places alien to her daily habits; in a certain sense it stretches her to her maximum capacity. Here, also for all of us, lies the secret of our lives as men and women and Christians. Our existence as individuals and as Church is projected outside ourselves. As had happened to Abraham, we are asked to come out of ourselves, from where we feel safe, to reach out to others in different places and surroundings. It is the Lord who asks this of us: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses... to the end of the earth" (Acts 1: 8). And it is once again the Lord who sets us on this path beside Mary as our travelling companion and caring mother. She reassures us, for she reminds us that the Son, her Jesus, is always with us as he promised: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28: 20).

The Evangelist notes that "Mary remained with her" (with her relative Elizabeth) "about three months" (Lk 1: 56). These simple words explain the most immediate purpose of Mary's journey. She knew from the Angel that Elizabeth was expecting a son and that she was already in her sixth month (Lk 1: 36). However Elizabeth was elderly and the closeness of Mary, still very young, could be helpful to her. For this reason Mary visits her and stays with her about three months in order to offer her that affectionate closeness, that practical help and all those daily services she needed. Elizabeth thus becomes the symbol of many elderly and sick people indeed, of all who are in need of help and love. And how many of them there are today too in our families, in our communities and in our cities! And Mary who had described herself as "the handmaid of the Lord" (Lk 1: 38) makes herself the servant of human beings. More precisely, she serves the Lord whom she encounters in her brethren.

Yet Mary's charity does not stop at material assistance but reaches its summit in giving Jesus himself, in "favouring an encounter with him". Once again, it is St Luke who emphasizes this: "When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb" (Lk 1: 41). We are thus at the heart and culmination of the evangelizing mission. We have come to the truest meaning and most genuine purpose of every missionary journey: to give people the living and personal Gospel which is the Lord Jesus himself. And Jesus' Gospel is a communication and a gift which as Elizabeth testifies fill the heart with joy: "For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy" (Lk 1: 44). Jesus is the only true treasure to give to humanity that we possess. It is for him that the men and women of our time have a deep longing, even when they seem to ignore or to reject him. It is for him that the society in which we live, Europe and the whole world, has so great a need.

This extraordinary responsibility is entrusted to us. Let us live it with joy and commitment, so that ours may truly be a civilization in which truth, justice, freedom and love prevail, the fundamental and irreplaceable pillars of a true orderly and peaceful coexistence. Let us live this responsibility by devoting ourselves to listening to the word of God in brotherly union, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (cf. Acts 2: 42). May this be the grace we ask of the Most Holy Virgin this evening. My Blessing to you all!

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