



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS
BENEDICT XVI
TO TURKEY
(NOVEMBER 28 - DECEMBER 1, 2006)

MASS BEFORE THE SHRINE OF MERYEM ANA EVİ

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER

Ephesus

Wednesday, 29 November 2006

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In this Eucharistic celebration we praise the Lord for Mary's divine motherhood, a mystery solemnly confessed and proclaimed in Ephesus at the Ecumenical Council of 431. To this place, so dear to the Christian community, my venerable predecessors the Servants of God [Paul VI](#) and [John Paul II](#) came as pilgrims; the latter visited this Shrine on 30 November 1979, just over a year after the beginning of his Pontificate. Another of my Predecessors was in this country not as Pope, but as the Papal Representative, from January 1935 to December 1944, Blessed John XXIII, Angelo Roncalli, whose memory still enkindles great devotion and affection. He very much esteemed and admired the Turkish people. Here I would like to quote an entry in his *Journal of a Soul*: "I love the Turks; I appreciate the natural qualities of these people who have their own place reserved in the march of civilization" (pp. 233-4). He also left to the Church and the world the legacy of his Christian optimism, rooted in deep faith and constant union with God. In that same spirit, I turn to this nation and, in a special way, to the "little flock" of Christ living in its midst, in order to offer a word of encouragement and to manifest the affection of the whole Church. With great love I greet all of you here present, the faithful of Izmir, Mersin, Iskenderun and Antakia, and others from different parts of the world, as well as those who could not take part in this celebration but are spiritually united with us. I greet in particular Archbishop Ruggero Franceschini of Izmir,

Archbishop Giuseppe Bernardini, Archbishop emeritus of Izmir, Bishop Luigi Padovese, the priests and the religious. Thank you for your presence, your witness and your service to the Church in this blessed land where, at its very beginnings, the Christian community experienced great growth, a fact reflected in the numerous pilgrimages made to Turkey to this day.

Mother of God – Mother of the Church

We have listened to a passage from Saint John's Gospel which invites us to contemplate the moment of the Redemption when Mary, united to her Son in the offering of his sacrifice, extended her motherhood to all men and women, and in particular to the disciples of Jesus. A privileged witness to that event was the author of the Fourth Gospel, John, the only one of the Apostles to remain at Golgotha with the Mother of Jesus and the other women. Mary's motherhood, which began with her *fiat* in Nazareth, is fulfilled at the foot of the Cross. Although it is true – as Saint Anselm says – that “from the moment of her *fiat* Mary began to carry all of us in her womb”, the maternal vocation and mission of the Virgin towards those who believe in Christ actually began when Jesus said to her: “Woman, behold your son!” (*Jn* 19:26). Looking down from the Cross at his Mother and the beloved disciple by her side, the dying Christ recognized the firstfruits of the family which he had come to form in the world, the beginning of the Church and the new humanity. For this reason, he addressed Mary as “Woman”, not as “Mother”, the term which he was to use in entrusting her to his disciple: “Behold your Mother!” (*Jn* 19:27). The Son of God thus fulfilled his mission: born of the Virgin in order to share our human condition in everything but sin, at his return to the Father he left behind in the world the sacrament of the unity of the human race (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1): the family “brought into unity from the unity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Saint Cyprian, *De Orat. Dom.*, 23: *PL* 4, 536), at whose heart is this new bond between the Mother and the disciple. Mary's *divine motherhood* and her *ecclesial motherhood* are thus inseparably united.

Mother of God – Mother of Unity

The first reading presented what could be called the “Gospel” of the Apostle of the Gentiles: all men and women, including the pagans, are called in Christ to share fully in the mystery of salvation. The text also contains the expression that I have chosen as the motto for my Apostolic Journey: “He, Christ, is our peace” (*Eph* 2:14). Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul tells us that Jesus Christ has not only brought us peace, but that he *is* our peace. And he justifies this statement by referring to the mystery of the Cross: by shedding “his blood”, by offering in sacrifice “his flesh”, Jesus destroyed hostility “in himself” and created “in himself one new man in place of the two” (*Eph* 2:14-16). The Apostle explains how, in a truly unforeseen way, messianic peace has now come about in Christ's own person and his saving mystery. He explains it by writing, during his imprisonment, to the Christian community which lived here, in Ephesus: “to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus” (*Eph* 1:1), as he says in the salutation of the Letter. The Apostle wishes them “grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (*Eph* 1:2).

Grace is the power that transforms man and the world; *peace* is the mature fruit of this transformation. Christ is grace; Christ is peace. Paul knows that he has been sent to proclaim a “mystery”, a divine plan that only in the fullness of time has been carried out and revealed in Christ: namely, that “the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel” (*Eph 3:6*). This *mystery* is accomplished, in salvation history, *in the Church*, the new People in which, now that the old dividing wall has been broken down, Jews and pagans find themselves united. Like Christ himself, the Church is not only the *instrument* of unity, but also its *efficacious sign*. And the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Christ and of the Church, is the *Mother* of that *mystery of unity* which Christ and the Church inseparably signify and build up, in the world and throughout history.

Let us implore peace for Jerusalem and the whole world

The Apostle of the Gentiles says that Christ “has made us both one” (*Eph 2:14*): these words properly refer to the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the mystery of eternal salvation, yet they can also extend, by analogy, to the relationship between the peoples and civilizations present in the world. Christ “came to proclaim peace” (*Eph 2:17*), not only between Jews and non-Jews, but between all nations, since all have their origin in the same God, the one Creator and Lord of the universe. Strengthened by God’s word, from here in Ephesus, a city blessed by the presence of Mary Most Holy – who we know is loved and venerated also by Muslims – *let us lift up to the Lord a special prayer for peace between peoples*. From this edge of the Anatolian peninsula, a natural bridge between continents, let us implore peace and reconciliation, above all for those dwelling in the Land called “Holy” and considered as such by Christians, Jews and Muslims alike: it is the land of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, destined to be the home of a people that would become a blessing for all the nations (cf. *Gen 12:1-3*). Peace for all of humanity! May Isaiah’s prophecy soon be fulfilled: “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (*Is 2:4*). We all need this universal peace; and the Church is called to be not only the prophetic herald, but even more, the “sign and instrument” of this peace. Against the backdrop of universal peace, the yearning for *full communion and concord between all Christians* becomes even more profound and intense. Present at today’s celebration are Catholic faithful of various rites, and this is a reason for joyful praise of God. These rites, when they converge in unity and common witness, are an expression of that marvellous variety which adorns the Bride of Christ. In this regard, the unity of the Ordinaries of the Episcopal Conference in fellowship and the sharing of pastoral efforts must set an example.

Magnificat

In today’s liturgy we have repeated, as the refrain of the Responsorial Psalm, the song of praise proclaimed by the Virgin of Nazareth on meeting her elderly kinswoman Elizabeth (cf. *Lk 1:39*). Our hearts too were consoled by the words of the Psalmist: “steadfast love and faithfulness will

meet, righteousness and peace will kiss” (*Ps* 85:10). Dear brothers and sisters, in this visit I have wanted to convey my personal love and spiritual closeness, together with that of the universal Church, to the Christian community here in Turkey, a small minority which faces many challenges and difficulties daily. With firm trust let us sing, together with Mary, a *magnificat* of praise and thanksgiving to God who has looked with favour upon the lowliness of his servant (cf. *Lk* 1:48). Let us sing joyfully, even when we are tested by difficulties and dangers, as we have learned from the fine witness given by the Roman priest Don Andrea Santoro, whom I am pleased to recall in this celebration. Mary teaches us that the source of our joy and our one sure support is Christ, and she repeats his words: “Do not be afraid” (*Mk* 6:50), “I am with you” (*Mt* 28:20). Mary, Mother of the Church, accompany us always on our way! Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us! *Aziz Meryem Mesih’in Annesi bizim için Dua et. Amen.*

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