



# The Holy See

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*TE DEUM* AND FIRST VESPERS  
OF THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

***HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI***

*St Peter's Basilica*  
*Sunday, 31 December 2006*

*Your Eminences,*  
*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,*  
*Distinguished Authorities,*  
*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

We are gathered in the Vatican Basilica to give thanks to the Lord at the end of the year and to sing the *Te Deum* together. I cordially thank all of you for wishing to join me on such an important occasion.

In the first place, I greet the Cardinals, my venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood, the men and women Religious, the consecrated persons and all the lay faithful who represent the entire Ecclesial Community of Rome. In particular I greet the Mayor of Rome and the other Authorities present.

On this evening of 31 December, two different perspectives intersect: one is linked to the end of the civil year, the other to the liturgical Solemnity of Mary Most Holy, Mother of God, which concludes the Octave of Holy Christmas. The first event is common to all, the second concerns believers. Their intersection confers a special character upon this evening celebration, in a particular spiritual atmosphere that is conducive to reflection.

The first, most evocative, theme is linked to the dimension of *time*.

In the last hours of every solar year we participate in some worldly "rites" which in the

contemporary context are mainly marked by amusement and often lived as an evasion from reality, as it were, to exorcise the negative aspects and propitiate improbable good luck. How different the attitude of the Christian Community must be!

The Church is called to live these hours, making the Virgin Mary's sentiments her own. With her, the Church is invited to keep her gaze fixed on the Infant Jesus, the new Sun rising on the horizon of humanity and, comforted by his light, to take care to present to him "the joy and the hope, the grief and the anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1).

Consequently, two different evaluations of the dimension of "time" confront each other, one quantitative and the other qualitative.

On the one hand, the solar cycle with its rhythms; on the other, what St Paul called the "fullness of time" (cf. Gal 4: 4), that is, the culminating moment of the history of the universe and of the human race when the Son of God was born in the world. The time of the promises was fulfilled and, when Mary's pregnancy reached its term, "the earth", a Psalm says, "yielded its increase" (Ps 67[66]: [7]6)

The coming of the Messiah, foretold by the Prophets, is qualitatively the most important event of all history, on which it confers its ultimate and full meaning. It is not historical and political coordinates that condition God's choice, but on the contrary, the event of the Incarnation that "fills" history with value and meaning.

We, who come 2,000 years after that event, can affirm this, so to speak, also *a posteriori*, after having known the whole life of Jesus, until his death and Resurrection. We are witnesses at the same time of his glory and his humility, of the immense value of his coming and of God's infinite respect for us human beings and for our history.

He did not fill time by pouring himself into it from on high, but "from within", making himself a tiny seed to lead humanity to its full maturation.

God's style required a long period of preparation to reach from Abraham to Jesus Christ, and after the Messiah's coming, history did not end but continued its course, apparently the same but in reality visited by God and oriented to the Lord's second and definitive Coming at the end of time. We might say that Mary's Motherhood is a real symbol and sacrament of all this, an event at the same time human and divine.

In the passage from the Letter to the Galatians that we have just heard, St Paul said: "God sent forth his Son, born of woman" (Gal 4: 4). Origen commented: "Note well that he did not say, 'born by means of a woman' but 'born of a woman'" (*Comment on the Letter to the Galatians*, PG 14,

1298).

This acute observation of the great exegete and ecclesiastical writer is important: in fact, if the Son of God had been born only "by means of" a woman, he would not truly have taken on our humanity, something which instead he did by taking flesh "of" Mary. Mary's motherhood, therefore, is true and fully human.

The fundamental truth about Jesus as a divine Person who fully assumed our human nature is condensed in the phrase: "God sent forth his Son born of woman". He is the Son of God, he is generated by God and *at the same time* he is the son of a woman, Mary. He comes from her. He is *of* God and *of* Mary.

For this reason one can and must call the Mother of Jesus the Mother of God. This title, rendered in Greek as *Theotokos*, probably appeared for the first time in the very region of Alexandria, Egypt, precisely where Origen lived in the first half of the third century. However, she was dogmatically defined as such only two centuries later, in 431 by the Council of Ephesus, a city to which I had the joy of going on pilgrimage a month ago during my Apostolic Visit to Turkey.

Indeed, thinking back to that unforgettable Visit, how could I fail to express all my filial gratitude to the Holy Mother of God for the special protection which she granted to me in those days of grace? *Theotokos*, Mother of God: every time we recite the *Hail Mary* we address the Virgin with this title, imploring her to pray "for us sinners".

At the end of a year, we feel a special need to call on the motherly intercession of Mary Most Holy for the city of Rome, for Italy, for Europe and for the whole world. Let us entrust to Mary, who is the Mother of Mercy incarnate, particularly those situations to which the Lord's grace alone can bring peace, comfort and justice.

The Virgin heard the Angel announcing her divine Motherhood say to her: "With God nothing will be impossible" (Lk 1: 37). Mary believed and for this reason she is blessed (cf. Lk 1: 45). What is impossible to man becomes possible to the one who believes (cf. Mk 9: 23).

Thus, as 2006 draws to a close and the dawn of 2007 can already be glimpsed, let us ask the Mother of God to obtain for us the gift of a mature faith: a faith that we would like to resemble hers as far as possible, a clear, genuine, humble and at the same time courageous faith, steeped in hope and enthusiasm for the Kingdom of God, a faith devoid of all fatalism and wholly set on cooperating with the divine will in full and joyful obedience and with the absolute certainty that God wants nothing but love and life, always and for everyone.

Obtain for us, O Mary, an authentic, pure faith. May you always be thanked and blessed, Holy Mother of God! Amen!

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