



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO LORETO
ON THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE VISIT OF BLESSED JOHN XXIII
(4 OCTOBER 2012)

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

*Our Lady of Loreto Square, Loreto
Thursday, 4 October 2012*

[\[Video\]](#)

[Photo Gallery 1](#)

[Photo Gallery 2](#)

*Your Eminences,
Dear Brother Bishops,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

On 4 October 1962, Blessed [John XXIII](#) came as a pilgrim to this Shrine to entrust to the Virgin Mary the [Second Vatican Ecumenical Council](#), due to begin a week later. On that occasion, with deep filial devotion to the Mother of God, he addressed her in these words: “Again today, and in the name of the entire episcopate, I ask you, sweetest Mother, as *Help of Bishops*, to intercede for me as Bishop of Rome and for all the bishops of the world, to obtain for us the grace to enter the Council Hall of Saint Peter’s Basilica, as the Apostles and the first disciples of Jesus entered the Upper Room: with one heart, one heartbeat of love for Christ and for souls, with one purpose only, to live and to sacrifice ourselves for the salvation of individuals and peoples. Thus, by your maternal intercession, in the years and the centuries to come, may it be said that the grace of God prepared, accompanied and crowned the twenty-first Ecumenical Council, filling all the children of

the holy Church with a new fervour, a new impulse to generosity, and a renewed firmness of purpose” (AAS 54 [1962], 727).

Fifty years on, having been called by divine Providence to succeed that unforgettable Pope to the See of Peter, I too have come on pilgrimage to entrust to the Mother of God two important ecclesial initiatives: the *Year of Faith*, which will begin in a week, on 11 October, on the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the [Second Vatican Council](#), and the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which I have convened this October with the theme “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith”. Dear friends, to all of you I offer my most cordial greetings. I thank the Most Reverend Giovanni Tonucci, Archbishop of Loreto, for his warm words of welcome. I greet the other bishops present, the priests, the Capuchin Fathers, to whom the pastoral care of this shrine is entrusted, and the religious sisters. I also salute Dr Paolo Niccoletti, Mayor of Loreto, thanking him for his courteous words, and I greet the representatives of the government and the civil and military authorities here present. My thanks also go to those who have generously offered their assistance to make my pilgrimage possible.

As I said in my Apostolic Letter announcing the *Year of Faith*, “I wish to invite my brother bishops from all over the world to join the Successor of Peter, during this time of spiritual grace that the Lord offers us, in recalling the precious gift of faith” ([Porta Fidei](#), 8). It is precisely here at Loreto that we have the opportunity to attend the school of Mary who was called “blessed” because she “believed” (*Lk* 1:45). This Shrine, built around her earthly home, preserves the memory of the moment when the angel of Lord came to Mary with the great announcement of the Incarnation, and she gave her reply. This humble home is a physical, tangible witness to the greatest event in our history, the Incarnation; the Word became flesh and Mary, the handmaid of the Lord, is the privileged channel through which God came to dwell among us (cf. *Jn* 1:14). Mary offered her very body; she placed her entire being at the disposal of God’s will, becoming the “place” of his presence, a “place” of dwelling for the Son of God. We are reminded here of the words of the Psalm with which, according to the Letter to the Hebrews, Christ began his earthly life, saying to the Father, “Sacrifices and offering you have not desired, but you have prepared a body for me... Behold, I have come to do your will, O God” (10:5,7). To the Angel who reveals God’s plan for her, Mary replies in similar words: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word” (*Lk* 1:38). The will of Mary coincides with the will of the Son in the Father’s unique project of love and, in her, heaven and earth are united, God the Creator is united to his creature. God becomes man, and Mary becomes a “living house” for the Lord, a temple where the Most High dwells. Here at Loreto fifty years ago, Blessed [John XXIII](#) issued an invitation to contemplate this mystery, to “reflect on that union of heaven and earth, which is the purpose of the Incarnation and Redemption”, and he went on to affirm that the aim of the Council itself was to spread ever wider the beneficent impact of the Incarnation and Redemption on all spheres of life (cf. AAS 54 [1962], 724). This invitation resounds today with particular urgency. In the present crisis affecting not only the economy but also many sectors of society, the Incarnation of the Son of God speaks to us of how important man is to God, and God to man. Without God, man

ultimately chooses selfishness over solidarity and love, material things over values, having over being. We must return to God, so that man may return to being man. With God, even in difficult times or moments of crisis, there is always a horizon of hope: the Incarnation tells us that we are never alone, that God has come to humanity and that he accompanies us.

The idea of the Son of God dwelling in the “living house”, the temple which is Mary, leads us to another thought: we must recognize that where God dwells, all are “at home”; wherever Christ dwells, his brothers and sisters are no longer strangers. Mary, who is the Mother of Christ, is also our mother, and she open to us the door to her home, she helps us enter into the will of her Son. So it is faith which gives us a home in this world, which brings us together in one family and which makes all of us brothers and sisters. As we contemplate Mary, we must ask if we too wish to be open to the Lord, if we wish to offer our life as his dwelling place; or if we are afraid that the presence of God may somehow place limits on our freedom, if we wish to set aside a part of our life in such a way that it belongs only to us. Yet it is precisely God who liberates our liberty, he frees it from being closed in on itself, from the thirst for power, possessions, and domination; he opens it up to the dimension which completely fulfils it: the gift of self, of love, which in turn becomes service and sharing.

Faith lets us reside, or dwell, but it also lets us walk on the path of life. The Holy House of Loreto contains an important teaching in this respect as well. Its location on a street is well known. At first this might seem strange: after all, a house and a street appear mutually exclusive. In reality, it is precisely here that an unusual message about this House has been preserved. It is not a private house, nor does it belong to a single person or a single family, rather it is an abode open to everyone placed, as it were, on our street. So here in Loreto we find a house which lets us stay, or dwell, and which at the same time lets us continue, or journey, and reminds us that we are pilgrims, that we must always be on the way to another dwelling, towards our final home, the Eternal City, the dwelling place of God and the people he has redeemed (cf. *Rev 21:3*).

There is one more important point in the Gospel account of the Annunciation which I would like to underline, one which never fails to strike us: God asks for mankind’s “yes”; he has created a free partner in dialogue, from whom he requests a reply in complete liberty. In one of his most celebrated sermons, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux “recreates”, as it were, the scene where God and humanity wait for Mary to say “yes”. Turning to her he begs: “The angel awaits your response, as he must now return to the One who sent him... O Lady, give that reply which the earth, the underworld and the very heavens await. Just as the King and Lord of all wished to behold your beauty, in the same way he earnestly desires your word of consent... Arise, run, open up! Arise with faith, run with your devotion, open up with your consent!” (*In laudibus Virginis Matris, Hom. IV,8: Opera omnia*, Edit. Cisterc. 4, 1966, p.53f). God asks for Mary’s free consent that he may become man. To be sure, the “yes” of the Virgin is the fruit of divine grace. But grace does not eliminate freedom; on the contrary it creates and sustains it. Faith removes nothing from the human creature, rather it permits his full and final realization.

Dear brothers and sisters, on this pilgrimage in the footsteps of Blessed [John XXIII](#) – and which comes, providentially, on the day in which the Church remembers Saint Francis of Assisi, a veritable “living Gospel” – I wish to entrust to the Most Holy Mother of God all the difficulties affecting our world as it seeks serenity and peace, the problems of the many families who look anxiously to the future, the aspirations of young people at the start of their lives, the suffering of those awaiting signs or decisions of solidarity and love. I also wish to place in the hands of the Mother of God this special time of grace for the Church, now opening up before us. Mother of the “yes”, you who heard Jesus, speak to us of him; tell us of your journey, that we may follow him on the path of faith; help us to proclaim him, that each person may welcome him and become the dwelling place of God. Amen!

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