



The Holy See

ACT OF VENERATION OF THE IMMACULATE VIRGIN IN PIAZZA DI SPAGNA

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Solemnity of the Immaculate of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Wednesday, 8 December 2010

(Video)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This year too we have arranged to meet here, in Piazza di Spagna, to pay homage to the Immaculate Virgin on the occasion of her solemn Feast. I address my cordial greeting to all of you who have come here in great numbers, as well as to those who are taking part via radio and television. We are gathered round this historic monument, which today is surrounded by a mass of flowers, a sign of the love and devotion of the Roman People for the Mother of Jesus. The most beautiful gift, the most pleasing to her and which we are offering to her, is our prayer, the prayers we carry in our hearts and entrust to her intercession. They are invocations of thanksgiving and petition: thanksgiving for the gift of faith and for all the good we receive from God; and petition for the various needs, for the family, for health and for work, for every difficulty that life makes us encounter.

But when we come here, especially on this occasion of 8 December, what we receive from Mary is far more important than what we offer her. In fact, she gives us a message destined for each one of us, for the City of Rome and for the whole world. I, who am the Bishop of this City, also come to listen, not only for myself, but for everyone. And what does Mary say? She speaks to us with the Word of God who was made flesh in her womb. Her “message” is nothing other than Jesus, the One who is the whole of her life. It is thanks to him and for him that she is Immaculate. And just as the Son of God became a man for our sake, so too she, the Mother, was preserved from sin for our sake, for everyone, in anticipation of God’s salvation for every human being.

Thus Mary tells us that we are all called to open ourselves to the action of the Holy Spirit in order, in our ultimate destiny, to attain an immaculate state, fully and definitively free from evil. She tells us this with her own holiness, with her gaze full of hope and compassion which evokes words such as these: "Do not fear, my child, God loves you; he loves you personally; he thought of you before you came into the world and called you into being to fill you with love and with life; and for this reason he came to meet you, he made himself like you, he became Jesus, God-man, like you in all things but without sin; he gave himself for your sake to the point of dying on the Cross, and thus he gave you a new life, free, holy and immaculate" (cf. Eph 1:3-5).

Mary gives us this message and, when I come here on this Feast, it impresses me because I feel it is addressed to the whole City, to all the men and women who live in Rome: even to those who do not think of it, who do not even remember that today is the Feast of the Immaculate Conception; to those who feel lonely and forsaken.

Mary's gaze is God's gaze upon each one of us. She looks at us with the Father's love itself and blesses us. She acts as our "advocate" and we invoke her thus in the Salve, Regina: *Advocata nostra*. Even if everyone were to speak badly of us, she, the Mother, would speak well of us because her immaculate Heart is in tune with God's mercy. So it is that she sees the City: not as an anonymous agglomeration but as a constellation in which God knows each one personally by name, one by one, and calls us to shine with his light. And those who in the world's eyes are the first, to God are the lowliest; those who are little to God are great.

The Mother looks at us as God looked at her, a humble young girl of Nazareth, insignificant in the world's eyes but chosen and precious to God. He recognizes in each one his or her likeness to his Son Jesus, even though we are so different! But who knows the power of divine Grace better than her? Who knows better than her that nothing is impossible for God who can even draw good from evil?

This, dear brothers and sisters, is the message we receive here, at the feet of Mary Immaculate.

It is a message of trust for every person of this City and of the whole world; a message of hope not made of words but of her history itself. She, a woman of our lineage, who gave birth to the Son of God and shared her whole life with him! And today she tells us: this is also your destiny, your own destiny and the destiny of all: to be holy like our Father, to be immaculate like our Brother Jesus Christ, to be loved children, all adopted in order to form a great family with no boundaries of colour or language, because God, Father of every human being, is one.

Thank you, O Mother Immaculate, for being with us always! May you never cease to watch over our City: comfort the sick, encourage the young and sustain families. Instill in them the strength to reject evil in all its forms and to choose good, even when it comes at a cost and entails going against the tide. Give us the joy to feel loved by God, blessed by him, predestined to be his

children.

Immaculate Virgin, our sweetest Mother, pray for us!

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