



# The Holy See

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POPE JOHN PAUL II

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday, 5 November 1997*

## ***We can count on Mary's intercession***

1. Down the centuries Marian devotion has enjoyed an interrupted development. In addition to the traditional liturgical feasts dedicated to the Lord's Mother, there has been a flowering of countless expressions of piety, often approved and encouraged by the Church's Magisterium.

Many Marian devotions and prayers are an extension of the liturgy itself and have sometimes contributed to its overall enrichment, as is the case with the Office in honour of the Blessed Virgin and other pious compositions which have become part of the Breviary.

The first known Marian invocation goes back to the third century and begins with the words: "We fly to thy patronage (*Sub tuum praesidium*), O holy Mother of God...". However, since the 14th century the most common prayer among Christians has been the "Hail Mary".

By repeating the first words the angel addressed to Mary, it leads the faithful to contemplate the mystery of the Incarnation. The Latin word "Ave" translates the Greek word "Chaire": it is an invitation to joy and could be translated "Rejoice". The Eastern hymn "Akathistos" repeatedly stresses this "rejoice". In the "Hail Mary" the Blessed Virgin is called "full of grace" and is thus recognized for the perfection and beauty of her soul.

The phrase "The Lord is with thee" reveals God's special personal relationship with Mary, which fits into the great plan for his covenant with all humanity. Next, the statement "Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus" expresses the fulfilment of the divine plan in the Daughter of Zion's virginal body.

Calling upon "Holy Mary, Mother of God", Christians ask the one who was the immaculate Mother of the Lord by a unique privilege: "Pray for us sinners", and entrust themselves to her at the present moment and at the ultimate moment of death.

2. The traditional prayer of the "Angelus" also invites Christians to meditate on the mystery of the Incarnation, urging them to take Mary as their point of reference at different times of their day in order to imitate her willingness to fulfil the divine plan of salvation. This prayer makes us relive in a way that great event in human history, the Incarnation, to which every "Hail Mary" refers. Here we find the value and attraction of the "Angelus", expressed so many times not only by theologians and pastors but also by poets and painters.

In Marian devotion the Rosary has taken on an important role. By repeating the "Hail Mary", it leads us to contemplate the mysteries of faith. In nourishing the Christian people's love for the Mother of God, this simple prayer also orients Marian prayer in a clearer way to its goal: the glorification of Christ.

Pope Paul VI, like his Predecessors, especially Leo XIII, Pius XII and John XXIII, held the recitation of the Rosary in great esteem and wished it to be widely spread among families. Moreover, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus*, he explained its doctrine by recalling that it is a "Gospel prayer, centred on the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation", and stressing its "clearly Christological orientation" (n. 46).

Popular piety frequently adds a litany to the Rosary. The best known is the one used at the Shrine of Loreto and is therefore called the "Litany of Loreto".

With very simple invocations it helps us concentrate on Mary's person, in order to grasp the spiritual riches which the Father's love poured out in her.

3. As the liturgy and Christian piety demonstrate, the Church has always held devotion to Mary in high esteem, considering it inseparably linked to belief in Christ. It is in fact based on the Father's plan, the Saviour's will and the Paraclete's inspiration.

Having received salvation and grace from Christ, the Blessed Virgin is called to play an important role in humanity's redemption. Through Marian devotion Christians acknowledge the value of Mary's presence on their journey to salvation, having recourse to her for every kind of grace. They especially know that they can count on her motherly intercession to receive from the Lord everything necessary for growing in the divine life and for attaining eternal salvation.

As the many titles attributed to the Blessed Virgin and the continual pilgrimages to Marian shrines attest, the trust of the faithful in Jesus' Mother spurs them to call upon her for their daily needs.

They are certain that her maternal heart cannot remain indifferent to the material and spiritual distress of her children.

By encouraging the confidence and spontaneity of the faithful, devotion to the Mother of God thus helps to brighten their spiritual life and enables them to make progress on the demanding path of the Beatitudes.

4. Lastly, we would like to recall that devotion to Mary, by highlighting the human dimension of the Incarnation, helps us better to discern the face of a God who shares the joys and sufferings of humanity, the "God-with-us" whom she conceived as man in her most pure womb, gave birth to, cared for and followed with unspeakable love from his days in Nazareth and Bethlehem to those of the Cross and Resurrection.

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To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims, especially those from England, Japan, Canada and the United States, I invoke God's blessings of grace and peace.

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