



# The Holy See

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POPE JOHN PAUL II

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday, 20 August 1997*

## ***Mary fully adhered to revealed Truth***

1. The Church is a mother and virgin. After affirming that she is a mother, modeled on Mary, the Council gives her the title of virgin, explaining its significance: "She herself is a virgin, who keeps in its entirety and purity the faith she pledged to her spouse. Imitating the Mother of her Lord, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, she preserves with virginal purity an integral faith, firm hope and sincere charity" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 64).

Thus Mary is also a model of the Church's virginity. In this regard, it is necessary to explain that virginity does not belong to the Church in the strict sense, since it does not represent the state of life of the vast majority of the faithful. Indeed, by virtue of God's providential plan, marriage is the most widespread and, we could say, common state for those called to the faith. The gift of virginity is reserved to a limited number of the faithful, who are called to a particular mission within the ecclesial community.

Nevertheless, in mentioning St Augustine's teaching, the Council maintains that the Church is virginal in the spiritual sense of integrity in faith, hope and charity. Therefore, the Church is not a virgin in the body of all her members, but possesses a virginity of the spirit (*virginitas mentis*), that is, "integral faith, firm hope and sincere charity" (*In Io. Tr.*, 13, 12; *PL* 35, 1499).

2. The Constitution *Lumen gentium* therefore takes pains to recall that Mary's virginity, a model for that of the Church, also includes the physical dimension, by which she virginally conceived Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit without man's intervention.

Mary is a virgin in body and a virgin in heart, as appears from her intention to live in deep intimacy with the Lord, decisively manifested at the time of the Annunciation. Thus she who is invoked as "Virgin of virgins" is without doubt for everyone a very lofty example of purity and of total self-giving to the Lord. But she is a special source of inspiration for Christian virgins and for those who are radically and exclusively dedicated to the Lord in the various forms of consecrated life.

Thus after its important role in the work of salvation, Mary's virginity continues to have a beneficial influence on the Church's life.

3. Let us not forget that Christ is certainly the first and highest example for every chaste life. However Mary is a special model of chastity lived for love of the Lord Jesus.

She encourages all Christians to live chastity with particular commitment according to their own state, and to entrust themselves to the Lord in the different circumstances of life. She who is the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit *par excellence* helps believers rediscover their own body as the temple of God (cf. 1 Cor 6:19) and to respect its nobility and holiness.

Young people seeking genuine love look to the Blessed Virgin and invoke her motherly help to persevere in purity.

Mary reminds married couples of the fundamental values of marriage by helping them overcome the temptation to discouragement and to subdue the passions that try to sway their hearts. Her total dedication to God is a strong encouragement to them to live in mutual fidelity, so that they will never give in to the difficulties that beset conjugal communion.

4. The Council urges the faithful to look to Mary so that they may imitate her "virginally integral" faith, hope and charity.

To preserve the integrity of the faith is a demanding task for the Church, which is called to constant vigilance even at the cost of sacrifice and struggle. In fact, the Church's faith is not only threatened by those who reject the Gospel message, but especially by those who, in accepting only part of the revealed truth, refuse to share fully in the entire patrimony of the faith of Christ's Bride.

Unfortunately, this temptation, which we find from the Church's very beginning, continues to be present in her life, urging her to accept Revelation only in part, or to give the Word of God a limited, personal interpretation in conformity with the prevailing mentality and individual desires. Having fully adhered to the Word of the Lord, Mary represents for the Church an unsurpassable model of "virginally integral" faith, for with docility and perseverance she accepts the revealed Truth whole and entire. And by her constant intercession, she obtains for the Church the light of hope and the flame of charity, virtues of which, in her earthly life, she was an incomparable

example for everyone.

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

I am pleased to extend special greetings to the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience, especially those from England, the United Arab Emirates, India, Pakistan, Japan and the United States. As I prepare to leave tomorrow for the World Youth Day in Paris, I ask your prayers for this important event. Upon all of you I invoke the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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