



The Holy See

POPE JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Mary was witness to whole paschal mystery

1. After Jesus had been laid in the tomb, Mary “alone remains to keep alive the flame of faith, preparing to receive the joyful and astonishing announcement of the Resurrection” (*Address at the General Audience*, 3 April 1996; *L’Osservatore Romano* English edition, 10 April 1996, p. 7). The expectation felt on Holy Saturday is one of the loftiest moments of faith for the Mother of the Lord: in the darkness that envelops the world, she entrusts herself fully to the God of life, and thinking back to the words of her Son, she hopes in the fulfilment of the divine promises.

The Gospels mention various appearances of the risen Christ, but not a meeting between Jesus and his Mother. This silence must not lead to the conclusion that after the Resurrection Christ did not appear to Mary; rather it invites us to seek the reasons why the Evangelists made such a choice.

On the supposition of an “omission”, this silence could be attributed to the fact that what is necessary for our saving knowledge was entrusted to the word of those “chosen by God as witnesses” (Acts 10:41), that is, the Apostles, who gave their testimony of the Lord Jesus’ Resurrection “with great power” (cf. Acts 4:33). Before appearing to them, the Risen One had appeared to several faithful women because of their ecclesial function: “Go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me” (Mt 28:10).

If the authors of the New Testament do not speak of the Mother’s encounter with her risen Son, this can perhaps be attributed to the fact that such a witness would have been considered too biased by those who denied the Lord’s Resurrection, and therefore not worthy of belief.

2. Furthermore, the Gospels report a small number of appearances by the risen Jesus and certainly not a complete summary of all that happened during the 40 days after Easter. St Paul recalls that he appeared “to more than 500 brethren at one time” (1 Cor 15:6). How do we explain the fact that an exceptional event known to so many is not mentioned by the Evangelists? It is an obvious sign that other appearances of the Risen One were not recorded, although they were among the well-known events that occurred.

How could the Blessed Virgin, present in the first community of disciples (cf. Acts 1:14), be excluded from those who met her divine Son after he had risen from the dead?

3. Indeed, it is legitimate to think that the Mother was probably the first person to whom the risen Jesus appeared. Could not Mary’s absence from the group of women who went to the tomb at dawn (cf. Mk 16:1; Mt 28:1) indicate that she had already met Jesus? This inference would also be confirmed by the fact that the first witnesses of the Resurrection, by Jesus’ will, were the women who had remained faithful at the foot of the Cross and therefore were more steadfast in faith.

Indeed, the Risen One entrusts to one of them, Mary Magdalene, the message to be passed on to the Apostles (cf. Jn 20:17-18). Perhaps this fact too allows us to think that Jesus showed himself first to his Mother, who had been the most faithful and had kept her faith intact when put to the test.

Lastly, the unique and special character of the Blessed Virgin’s presence at Calvary and her perfect union with the Son in his suffering on the Cross seem to postulate a very particular sharing on her part in the mystery of the Resurrection.

A fifth-century author, Sedulius, maintains that in the splendour of his risen life Christ first showed himself to his mother. In fact, she, who at the Annunciation was the way he entered the world, was called to spread the marvellous news of the Resurrection in order to become the herald of his glorious coming. Thus bathed in the glory of the Risen One, she anticipates the Church’s splendour cf. Sedulius, *Paschale carmen*, 5, 357-364, CSEL 10, 140f).

4. It seems reasonable to think that Mary, as the image and model of the Church which waits for the Risen One and meets him in the group of disciples during his Easter appearances, had had a personal contact with her risen Son, so that she too could delight in the fullness of paschal joy.

Present at Calvary on Good Friday (cf. Jn 19:25) and in the Upper Room on Pentecost (cf. Acts 1:14), the Blessed Virgin too was probably a privileged witness of Christ’s Resurrection, completing in this way her participation in all the essential moments of the paschal mystery. Welcoming the risen Jesus, Mary is also a sign and an anticipation of humanity, which hopes to achieve its fulfilment through the resurrection of the dead.

In the Easter season, the Christian community addresses the Mother of the Lord and invites her to rejoice: “Regina Caeli, laetare. Alleluia!”. “Queen of heaven, rejoice. Alleluia!”. Thus it recalls Mary's joy at Jesus' Resurrection, prolonging in time the “rejoice” that the Angel addressed to her at the Annunciation, so that she might become a cause of “great joy” for all people.

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

I thank the young men and women of “Up with People” for their presence and for their generosity in donating the proceeds of their performances in Rome to the construction of a hospital in Albania for children suffering from heart disease. I also welcome the participants in the course sponsored by the NATO Defense College, and I encourage them in their efforts to promote international security and peace. Upon all the English-speaking visitors, including the pilgrims from England, India, Indonesia, Canada and the United States, I cordially invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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