



# The Holy See

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POPE JOHN PAUL II

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday, 10 September 1997*

## ***Mary: model of the Church at prayer***

1. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus* the Servant of God Paul VI, of venerable memory, presents the Blessed Virgin as a model of the Church at worship. This assertion is a corollary as it were to the truth that points to Mary as a paradigm for the People of God on the way to holiness: "That the Blessed Virgin is an exemplar in this field derives from the fact that she is recognized as a most excellent exemplar of the Church in the order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ, that is, of that interior disposition with which the Church, the beloved spouse, closely associated with her Lord, invokes Christ and through him worships the eternal Father" (n. 16).

2. She who at the Annunciation showed total availability for the divine plan represents for all believers a sublime model of attentiveness and docility to the Word of God.

In replying to the angel: "Let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38) and in stating her readiness to fulfil perfectly the Lord's will, Mary rightly shares in the beatitude proclaimed by Jesus: "Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it!" (Lk 11:28).

With this attitude, which encompasses her entire life, the Blessed Virgin indicates the high road of listening to the Word of the Lord, an essential element of worship, which has become typical of the Christian liturgy. Her example shows us that worship does not primarily consist in expressing human thoughts and feelings, but in listening to the divine Word in order to know it, assimilate it and put it into practice in daily life.

3. Every liturgical celebration is a memorial of the mystery of Christ in his salvific action for all

humanity and is meant to promote the personal participation of the faithful in the paschal mystery re-expressed and made present in the gestures and words of the rite.

Mary was a witness to the historical unfolding of the saving events, which culminated in the Redeemer's Death and Resurrection, and she kept "all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2:19) She was not merely present at the individual events, but sought to grasp their deep meaning, adhering with all her soul to what was being mysteriously accomplished in them.

Mary appears therefore as the supreme model of personal participation in the divine mysteries. She guides the Church in meditating on the mystery celebrated and in participating in the saving event, by encouraging the faithful to desire an intimate, personal relationship with Christ in order to co-operate with the gift of their own life in the salvation of all.

4. Mary also represents the model of the Church at prayer. In all probability Mary was absorbed in prayer when the angel Gabriel came to her house in Nazareth and greeted her. This prayerful setting certainly supported the Blessed Virgin in her reply to the angel and in her generous assent to the mystery of the Incarnation.

In the Annunciation scene, artists have almost always depicted Mary in a prayerful attitude. Of them all we recall Fra Angelico. This shows to the Church and every believer the atmosphere that should prevail during worship.

We could add that for the People of God Mary represents the model of every expression of their prayer life. In particular, she teaches Christians how to turn to God to ask for his help and support in the various circumstances of life.

Her motherly intercession at the wedding in Cana and her presence in the Upper Room at the Apostles' side as they prayed in expectation of Pentecost suggest that the prayer of petition is an essential form of co-operation in furthering the work of salvation in the world. By following her model, the Church learns to be bold in her asking, to persevere in her intercessions and, above all, to implore the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 11:13).

5. The Blessed Virgin also represents the Church's model for generously participating in sacrifice.

In presenting Jesus in the temple and, especially, at the foot of the Cross, Mary completes the gift of herself which associates her as Mother with the suffering and trials of her Son. Thus in daily life as in the Eucharistic celebration, the "Virgin presenting offerings" (*Marialis cultus*, n. 20) encourages Christians to "offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 2:5).

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

I am pleased to greet the participants in the Colloquium sponsored by the International Council of Christians and Jews: may your discussions and reflections lead to ever greater understanding, respect and co-operation between the followers of the Jewish and Christian faiths. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims, especially those from England, South Africa, Australia, Japan, Canada and the United States, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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