



The Holy See

POPE JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 24 September 1997

Mary has universal spiritual motherhood

1. Mary is mother of humanity in the order of grace. The Second Vatican Council highlights this role of Mary, linking it to her co-operation in Christ's Redemption. "In the designs of divine Providence, she was the gracious mother of the divine Redeemer here on earth, and above all others and in a singular way the generous associate and humble handmaid of the Lord" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 61).

With these statements, the Constituion *Lumen gentium* wishes to give proper emphasis to the fact that the Blessed Virgin was intimately associated with Christ's redemptive work, becoming the Saviour's "generous associate", "in a singular way".

With the actions of any mother, from the most ordinary to the most demanding, Mary freely co-operated in the work of humanity's salvation in profound and constant harmony with her divine Son.

2. The Council also points out that Mary's co-operation was inspired by the Gospel virtues of obedience, faith, hope and charity, and was accomplished under the influence of the Holy Spirit. It also recalls that the gift of her universal spiritual motherhood stems precisely from this co-operation: associated with Christ in the work of Redemption, which includes the spiritual regeneration of humanity, she becomes mother of those reborn to new life.

In saying that Mary is "a mother to us in the order of grace" (cf. *ibid.*), the Council stresses that her spiritual motherhood is not limited to the disciples alone, as though the words spoken by Jesus on

Calvary: "Woman, behold your son" (Jn 19:26), required a restrictive interpretation. Indeed, with these words the Crucified One established an intimate relationship between Mary and his beloved disciple, a typological figure of universal scope, intending to offer his Mother as Mother to all mankind.

On the other hand, the universal efficacy of the redeeming sacrifice and Mary's conscious co-operation with Christ's sacrificial offering does not allow any limitation of her motherly love.

Mary's universal mission is exercised in the context of her unique relationship with the Church. With her concern for every Christian, and indeed for every human creature, she guides the faith of the Church towards an ever deeper acceptance of God's Word, sustains her hope, enlivens her charity and fraternal communion and encourages her apostolic dynamism.

3. During her earthly life, Mary showed her spiritual motherhood to the Church for a very short time. Nonetheless, the full value of her role appeared after the Assumption and is destined to extend down the centuries to the end of the world. The Council expressly states: "This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she gave in faith at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the Cross, until the eternal fulfilment of all the elect" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 62).

Having entered the Father's eternal kingdom, closer to her divine Son and thus closer to us all, she can more effectively exercise in the Spirit the role of maternal intercession entrusted to her by divine Providence.

4. The heavenly Father wanted to place Mary close to Christ and in communion with him who can "save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25): he wanted to unite to the Redeemer's intercession as a priest that of the Blessed Virgin as a mother. It is a role she carries out for the sake of those who are in danger and who need temporal favours and, especially, eternal salvation: "By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress and Mediatrix" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 62).

These titles, suggested by the faith of the Christian people, help us better to understand the nature of the Mother of the Lord's intervention in the life of the Church and of the individual believer.

5. The title "Advocate" goes back to St Irenaeus. With regard to Eve's disobedience and Mary's obedience, he says that at the moment of the Annunciation "the Virgin Mary became the Advocate" of Eve (*Haer.* 5, 19, 1; *PG* 7, 1175-1176). In fact, with her "yes" she defended our first mother and freed her from the consequences of her disobedience, becoming the cause of salvation for her and the whole human race.

Mary exercises her role as "Advocate" by co-operating both with the Spirit the Paraclete and with the One who interceded on the Cross for his persecutors (cf. Lk 23:34), whom John calls our "advocate with the Father" (1 Jn 2:1). As a mother, she defends her children and protects them from the harm caused by their own sins.

Christians call upon Mary as "Helper", recognizing her motherly love which sees her children's needs and is ready to come to their aid, especially when their eternal salvation is at stake.

The conviction that Mary is close to those who are suffering or in situations of serious danger has prompted the faithful to invoke her as "Benefactress". The same trusting certainty is expressed in the most ancient Marian prayer with the words: "We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God; despise not our petitions in our necessities but deliver us always from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin" (from the *Roman Breviary*).

As maternal Mediatrix, Mary presents our desires and petitions to Christ, and transmits the divine gifts to us, interceding continually on our behalf.

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

I greet the new students of the Venerable English College and pray that the Lord will bless them abundantly as they begin their studies.

I extend a cordial welcome to the various ecumenical groups present, especially to the Executive Committee of the World Methodist Council. Thankful to God for the progress made so far in our official dialogue, I pray that the Holy Spirit will guide the Joint Commission in its current work. I send a special greeting to the General Secretary Dr Hale, who could not be here due to his wife's recent accident, and I pray for her prompt recovery.

I am so pleased to welcome the Delegation of the Disciples of Christ on the 20th anniversary of the dialogue between us. May the International Commission's continuing work on the theme of the Church's mission lead us steadily along the path towards ever greater unity.

I warmly greet the representatives of the Center of Christian-Jewish Understanding. I hope that your visit will further strengthen our mutual understanding and co-operation in the face of so many shared concerns.

Upon all the English-speaking visitors and pilgrims, especially those from England, Wales, Ireland, Nigeria, Australia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan and the United States, I invoke an abundance of divine grace and peace.

