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Pope Benedict XVI

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The Marian Thoughts of Pope Benedict XVI

August 6, 2006 to August 27, 2006



2006

August 6, 2006: Castel Gandolfo

In our time too, we urgently need to emerge from the darkness of evil, to experience the joy of the children of light! May Mary, whom we commemorated yesterday with special devotion on the annual memorial of the Dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major, obtain this gift for us. May the Blessed Virgin also obtain peace for the peoples of the Middle East, overwhelmed by fratricidal fighting! We know well that peace is first and foremost God's gift to be implored insistently in prayer, but at this time let us also remember that it is a commitment for all people of good will. May no one shirk this duty!

Thus, in the face of the bitter observation that so far the voices asking for an immediate cease-fire in that tormented region have gone unheard, I feel the urgent need to renew my pressing appeal in this regard, asking everyone to make an effective contribution to build a just and lasting peace. I entrust this renewed appeal to the intercession of the Most Holy Virgin.

[After the Angelus, the Pope said:]

I must recall on this Sunday, when the feast of the Transfiguration is celebrated, that other similar Sunday when the pilgrims who had gone to Castel Gandolfo for the Sunday Angelus were unable to take part in the Marian prayer with Pope Paul VI because in those very hours his state of health had deteriorated: As you know, the great Pontiff fell asleep in the Lord in the evening hours of that August 6, 1978. Let us remember him on this anniversary, our hearts grateful to God who gave him to his Church in the most important years of the Council and the post-conciliar period.

August 15, 2006: "In Her Face We Can Truly Perceive the Divine Light"

In the Magnificat, the great hymn of Our Lady that we have just heard in the Gospel, we find some surprising words. Mary says: "Henceforth all generations will call me blessed."

The Mother of the Lord prophesies the Marian praises of the Church for all of the future, the Marian devotion of the people of God until the end of time. In praising Mary, the Church did not invent something "adjacent" to Scripture: She responded to this prophecy which Mary made at that moment of grace.

And Mary's words were not only personal, perhaps arbitrary words. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit as St. Luke said, exclaimed with a loud cry: "Blessed is she who believed." And Mary, also filled with the Holy Spirit, continues and completes what Elizabeth said, affirming: "All generations will call me blessed."

It is a real prophecy, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and in venerating Mary, the Church responds to a command of the Holy Spirit; she does what she has to do.

We do not praise God sufficiently by keeping silent about his saints, especially Mary, "the holy one" who became his dwelling place on earth.

The simple and multiform light of God appears to us exactly in its variety and richness only in the countenance of the saints, who are the true mirrors of his light.

And it is precisely by looking at Mary's face that we can see more clearly than in any other way the beauty, goodness and mercy of God. In her face we can truly perceive the divine light.

"All generations will call me blessed." We can praise Mary, we can venerate Mary for she is "blessed," she is blessed for ever. And this is the subject of this feast. She is blessed because she is united to God, she lives with God and in God.

On the eve of his passion, taking leave of his disciples, the Lord

said: "In my Father's house are many rooms ... I go to prepare a place for you."

By saying, "I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word," Mary prepared God's dwelling here on earth; with her body and soul, she became his dwelling place and thereby opened the earth to heaven.

In the Gospel we have just heard, St. Luke, with various allusions, makes us understand that Mary is the true Ark of the Covenant, that the mystery of the temple -- God's dwelling place here on earth -- is fulfilled in Mary. God, who became present here on earth, truly dwells in Mary. Mary becomes his tent. What all the cultures desire -- that God dwells among us -- is brought about here.

St. Augustine says: "Before conceiving the Lord in her body she had already conceived him in her soul." She had made room for the Lord in her soul and thus really became the true temple where God made himself incarnate, where he became present on this earth.

Thus, being God's dwelling place on earth, in her the eternal dwelling place has already been prepared; it has already been prepared for forever. And this constitutes the whole content of the dogma of the assumption of Mary, body and soul, into heavenly glory, expressed here in these words. Mary is "blessed" because -- totally, in body and soul and forever -- she became the Lord's dwelling place.

If this is true, Mary does not merely invite our admiration and veneration, but she guides us, shows us the way of life, shows us how we can become blessed, how to find the path of happiness.

Let us listen once again to Elizabeth's words fulfilled in Mary's Magnificat: "Blessed is she who believed." The first and fundamental act in order to become a dwelling place of God and thus find definitive happiness is to believe: It is faith, faith in God, in that God who showed himself in Jesus Christ and makes himself heard in the divine word of holy Scripture.

Believing is not adding an opinion to others. And the conviction, the belief that God exists, is not information like any other. Regarding most information, it makes no difference to us whether it is true or false; it does not change our lives. But if God does not exist, life is empty, the future is empty. And if God exists, everything changes, life is light, our future is light and we have guidance for how to live. Therefore, believing constitutes the fundamental orientation of our life.

To believe, to say: "Yes, I believe that you are God, I believe that you are present among us in the incarnate Son," gives my life a direction, impels me to be attached to God, to unite with God and so to find my dwelling place, and the way to live.

To believe is not only a way of thinking or an idea; as has already been mentioned, it is a way of acting, a manner of living. To believe means to follow the trail indicated to us by the word of God. In addition to this fundamental act of faith, which is an existential act, a position taken for the whole of life, Mary adds another word: "His mercy is on those who fear him."

Together with the whole of Scripture, she is speaking of "fear of God." Perhaps this is a phrase with which we are not very familiar or do not like very much. But "fear of God" is not anguish; it is something quite different. As children, we are not anxious about the Father but we have fear of God, the concern not to destroy the love on which our life is based.

Fear of God is that sense of responsibility that we are bound to possess, responsibility for the portion of the world that has been entrusted to us in our lives. It is responsibility for the good administration of this portion of the world and of history, and one thus helps the just building of the world, contributing to the victory of goodness and peace.

"All generations will call you blessed": This means that the future, what is to come, belongs to God, it is in God's hands, that it is God who conquers.

Nor does he conquer the mighty dragon of which today's first reading speaks, the dragon that represents all the powers of violence in the world. They seem invincible but Mary tells us that they are not invincible.

The woman -- as the first reading and the Gospel show us -- is stronger, because God is stronger. Of course, in comparison with the dragon, so heavily armed, this woman who is Mary, who is the Church, seems vulnerable or defenseless.

And truly God is vulnerable in the world, because he is love and love is vulnerable. Yet he holds the future in his hands: It is love, not hatred, that triumphs; it is peace that is victorious in the end.

This is the great consolation contained in the dogma of Mary's assumption body and soul into heavenly glory. Let us thank the Lord for this consolation but let us also see it as a commitment for us to take the side of good and peace. And let us pray to Mary, queen of peace, to help peace to be victorious today: "Queen of peace, pray for us!" Amen!

August 16, 2006: "Mary Follows Our Steps With Gentle Trepidation."

Our usual weekly Wednesday meeting is taking place today in the climate of the solemnity of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. I would like to invite you therefore to turn your gaze once again to our heavenly mother, whom the liturgy presented to us as victorious with

Christ in heaven.

This feast has always been greatly cherished by the Christian people since the first centuries of Christianity. As is already known, it celebrates the glorification, including corporal, of that creature whom God chose as his mother, and that Jesus on the cross gave as mother to the whole of humanity.

The Assumption evokes a mystery that affects each one of us because, as the Second Vatican Council affirmed, Mary "precedes with her light the people of God as a sign of hope and consolation" ("Lumen Gentium," No. 68). We are so immersed in everyday struggles that at times we forget this consoling spiritual reality, which is an important truth of faith.

How is it possible to make this luminous sign of hope be increasingly perceived by present-day society? Today there are those who live as if they should never die, or as if all ends with death. Some behave as if man is the sole author of his destiny, as if God did not exist, at times even denying that there is a place for him in our world.

The great successes of technology and science, which have notably improved humanity's conditions of life, do not give solutions to the most profound questions of the human spirit. Only by openness to the mystery of God, who is love, can our hearts' thirst for truth and happiness be satisfied; only the perspective of eternity can give authentic value to historical events and above all to the mystery of human frailty, suffering and death.

On contemplating Mary in heavenly glory, we also understand that the earth is not our definitive homeland and that, if we live constantly oriented to eternal goods, one day we will share in her same glory. For this reason, despite the many daily difficulties, we must not lose serenity or peace.

The luminous sign of the Assumption to heaven shines even more when it seems that sad shadows of grief and violence loom over the horizon. We are sure that, from on high, Mary follows our steps with gentle trepidation, gives us serenity in the hour of darkness and storm, and gives us security with her maternal hand.

Supported by this conviction, we continue with confidence on our way of Christian commitment where providence leads us.

At the end of the audience, the Holy Father greeted pilgrims in several languages. In English, he said:

... Yesterday we contemplated the Virgin Mary's assumption into heaven. This mystery reminds us that our definitive homeland is not here on earth, and that our longing for fulfillment finds complete satisfaction only in eternal happiness. May our mother in heaven, who guides us on our way, inspire us with courage and hope

through the struggles of our daily life! I wish you a pleasant stay, and may God bless you all!

August 17, 2006: "Paradise Is the Authentic Goal of Our Earthly Pilgrimage"

Christian tradition has placed in the heart of summer one of the most ancient and evocative Marian feasts, the solemnity of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Just as Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father, Mary, at the end of the course of her existence on earth, was assumed into heaven.

The liturgy reminds us today of this consoling truth of faith, while singing the praises of her who was crowned with incomparable glory. "And a great portent appeared in heaven," we read in the passage of Revelation proposed today for our meditation, "a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (12:1). In this woman, resplendent with light, the Fathers of the Church recognized Mary. In her victory, the Christian people, pilgrim in history, perceives the fulfillment of its expectations and the sure sign of its hope.

Mary is an example and support for all believers: She encourages us not to lose confidence in the face of the difficulties and inevitable problems of every day. She assures us of her help and reminds us that what is essential is to seek and aspire for "things that are above, not for things on earth" (cf. Colossians 3:2). Immersed in daily occupations, we run the risk of believing that in this world, in which we are only passing by, is the objective of human existence. However, Paradise is the authentic goal of our earthly pilgrimage. How different our days would be if they were animated by this perspective! It is what happened to saints. Their human existence witnesses that when one lives with one's heart constantly directed to heaven, earthly realities are lived in their just value, as they are illuminated by the eternal truth of divine love.

To the Queen of Peace, whom we contemplate in heavenly glory, I would like to entrust once again the concerns of humanity in every place of the world tormented by violence. We join our brothers and sisters, who in these hours are gathered in the Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon in Harissa, for a Eucharistic celebration presided over by Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, who has traveled to Lebanon as my special envoy, to take consolation and concrete solidarity to all the victims of the conflict and to pray for the great intention of peace.

We are also in communion with the pastors and faithful of the Church in the Holy Land, who are gathered in the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth, around the papal representative in Israel and Palestine, Archbishop Antonio Franco, to pray for the same intentions.

My thoughts also go to the dear nation of Sri Lanka, threatened by

the deterioration of the ethnic conflict; to Iraq, where the terrible and daily trail of blood removes the perspective of reconciliation and reconstruction. May Mary inspire in all sentiments of understanding, a will to understand and desires for concord!

August 20, 2006: Castel Gandolfo

"Their Testimonies Can Be of Great Help for Many Families"

We entrust this difficult desire to find a balance between interiority and necessary work to the intercession of the Virgin, whom he loved from his childhood with tender and filial devotion, to the point of meriting the title of "Marian Doctor."

Let us invoke her so that she will obtain authentic and lasting peace for the whole world. In a famous address, St. Bernard compares Mary with the star that seafarers look to so as not to lose their way.

He wrote these famous words: "Whoever you are that perceive yourself during this mortal existence to be rather drifting in treacherous waters, at the mercy of the winds and the waves, than walking on firm ground, turn not away your eyes from the splendor of this guiding star, unless thou wish to be submerged by the storm. ... Look at the star, call upon Mary. ... With her for guide, you shall not go astray, while invoking her, you shall never lose heart ... if she walks before you, you shall not grow weary; if she shows you favor, you shall reach the goal," ("Homilia super Missus est," II, 17)."

August 23, 2006: "The Wounded and Dead Lamb Conquers!"

At the center of the vision that Revelation presents is the extremely significant image of the Woman, who gives birth to a male Child, and the complementary vision of the Dragon, which has fallen from the heavens, but is still very powerful. This Woman represents Mary, the Mother of the Redeemer, but she represents at the same time the whole Church, the People of God of all times, the Church that at all times, with great pain, again gives birth to Christ. And she is always threatened by the power of the Dragon. She seems defenseless, weak.

But, while she is threatened, pursued by the Dragon, she is also protected by God's consolation. And this Woman, at the end, is victorious. The Dragon does not conquer. This is the great prophecy of this book, which gives us confidence! The Woman who suffers in history, the Church which is persecuted, at the end is presented as the splendid Bride, image of the new Jerusalem, in which there is no more tears or weeping, image of the world transformed, of the new world whose light is God himself, whose lamp is the Lamb.

August 23, 2006: Angelus Address

The hope of all is that peace will finally prevail over violence and the

force of arms. Let us ask this with trusting insistence from Mary, always ready from her heavenly glory -- into which we will contemplate her assumption the day after tomorrow -- to intercede for her sons and daughters and to assist their needs.

August 27, 2006: Black Madonna of Jasna Gora

This act of entrustment was the source of most profound inspirations for spiritual and moral renewal during the period of preparations for the millennium of the baptism and of the start of Christian preaching in Poland, which occurred in 966 and subsequent years. ... Above all today, as my predecessor Pope John Paul II indicated, the vows of Jasna Gora are the indispensable condition of your social maturity and role in Europe.

St. Monica and St. Augustine invite us to turn with confidence to Mary, seat of wisdom. To her we entrust Christian parents so that, like Monica, they will support their children on their way with their example and prayer.

To the virgin mother of God, we commend young people so that, as Augustine, they will always tend to the fullness of truth and love, which is Christ: He alone can satisfy the profound needs of the human heart.