An Indirect Presence:

The Virgin Mary in the Great Jubilee

The Coming Third Millennium, Pope John Paul II's 1995 letter, outlines an ambitious program of preparation to mark the 2,000th anniversary of the Incarnation and birth of Jesus Christ. Far from triumphalism or apocalyptic expectations, this anniversary of the event to which Christianity owes its existence is a "challenge involving a special grace of the Lord for the Church and the whole of humanity."

A first challenge to the Church is one of asking forgiveness for past intolerance, and for the use of violence to advance orthodoxy. New efforts, the letter insists, must be made to heal the divisions which occurred during Christianity's second millennium. With ever greater insistence, the Church prays to the Holy Spirit for the grace of Christian unity (CTM 34).

The entire millennium observance is a great "prayer of praise and thanksgiving for the gift of the Incarnation of the Son of God and of the Redemption."

In the three-year preparatory period, 1997-99, each year is dedicated to one of the persons of the Blessed Trinity—Christ ('97), the Holy Spirit ('98), the Father ('99); to the virtues—faith ('97), hope ('98), and charity ('99); and to the sacraments—Baptism ('97), Confirmation ('98), Penance ('99), and the Eucharist (2000).

References to the Virgin Mary are found throughout the letter (1, 2, 4, 7, 26, 27, 28, 43, 48, 54, 55, 59). The Virgin Mary illustrates the bonds which unite the Church and humanity to the Trinity, and she is the model or exemplar of faith, hope, and charity. The letter speaks of the Virgin Mary as indirectly or obliquely present to the Church throughout the celebration; her presence is always totally directed and related to the Trinity and to Christ, the main focus of the millennium.

1997 is the year of Christ, dedicated to a renewed appreciation of the Scriptures, the sacrament of Baptism, and the virtue of faith. Through the Divine Motherhood, Mary is related as none other to the mystery of Christ's Incarnation, and she is "model of faith in practice."

1998 is the year of the Holy Spirit, devoted to a renewed appreciation of the Spirit's gifts, the sacrament of Confirmation, and the virtue of hope. Christ's birth was made possible through the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. She is woman open to the voice of the Spirit, the woman of hope who, like Abraham, accepted God's will "hoping against hope" (cf. Rom. 4:18).

1999 is the year of the Father who is the source of all creation and of the Church. Here there is an acknowledgement that both God's plan of creation and the witness of
the Church has been clouded by sin (sacrament of Penance). The Virgin Mary was chosen by the Father for the “unique mission” of being the Mother of the long-awaited Savior. Her motherhood is felt as a loving and urgent invitation to have reverence for creation and to bring all peoples into God's family.

2000 is the Great Jubilee. In the Hebrew Scriptures, every fiftieth year was a “jubilee,” a time when slaves were freed, debts remitted, equality restored. This was the “year of God's favor,” announced by the prophet Isaiah and fulfilled by the coming of Jesus. Since the year 1500, the Church has continued the tradition of jubilee years by declaring Holy Years to mark the beginning of a new century and, later, the divisions within the century.

In preparation for the Great Jubilee, there will be special synods of bishops, ecumenical meetings, and papal journeys; but the main celebrations of the Great Jubilee will all be within the context of the liturgical year. The Holy Year will begin on November 29, 1999, the First Sunday of Advent, and will conclude on November 26, 2000, the Solemnity of Christ the King. With the opening of the Holy Door of the Jubilee of the Year 2000 at the Christmas Mass of 1999, the Church crosses the threshold into the new millennium (CTM 33). Friday, December 31, 1999, will be a day of prayer of praise and thanksgiving for the Incarnation, and Saturday, January 1, 2000, will be the commemoration of Mary’s Divine Motherhood and the World Day of Prayer for Peace.

The themes of the preparatory period and the Jubilee itself are illustrated within the liturgy. Every Eucharist begins and ends with the Trinity: “The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.” The Eucharistic Prayer proclaims that all comes from the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit.

The Virgin Mary’s relation to the Trinity is illustrated in various Marian feasts, liturgical seasons, and commemorations. The Advent and Christmas season and the Solemnity of the Mother of God on January 1 are a “prolonged celebration of the divine, virginal and salvific motherhood.” In the liturgy, the Church sees Mary as the “exemplar” and model of faith, hope, and charity.

The Incarnation of the Son of God, rather than the birth of Christ, is the focus of the Jubilee. March 25 was once known as the Incarnation of Christ; it is now the Annunciation of the Lord, but a “joint feast of Christ and the Blessed Virgin” (MC 6). The Annunciation liturgy celebrates “the Blessed Virgin’s free consent and cooperation in the plan of redemption” (MC 6). Mary’s reply to the Angel made possible the Incarnation. “Never in human history did so much depend, as it did then, upon the consent of one human creature” (CTM 1).

*The Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary* illustrates the bonds relating the Virgin Mary to the Trinity. Mary gave birth to the “son of the eternal Father” (2). Through her relation to Christ, she is “mother of God” (*Dei Genetrix, Deipara*, 2, 4, 30); “mother of the savior” (1); “mother of the Lord,” “mother and associate of the redeemer” (20, 33); and “the most splendid fruit of redemption” (37).

At the Annunciation, Mary received “the angel’s message in faith and conceived by the power of the Spirit” (2), and she was formed by the Holy Spirit “to be a new creation” (3). Attentive to the voice of the Spirit (20), her heart was the “home of the Eternal Word, the sanctuary of the Spirit” (28).

Evangelization is integral to the Great Jubilee. It is Mary who is the first evangelizer. “The first disciple of her Son, she receives the message of the Gospel, treasures it in her heart, and reflects on it in her mind” (17). Her example encourages “new preachers of the Gospel, cherishes them with a mother’s love, and sustains them by her unceasing prayer, so that they may bring the Good News of Christ the Savior to all the world” (18). At Mary’s Visitation, we pray that we “may bring Christ to others and proclaim God’s greatness by the praise of our lips and the holiness of our lives” (3).

After affirming Mary’s presence to the Church throughout the Great Jubilee and its preparatory period, the pope entrusts “to the maternal intercession of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer,” the entire Jubilee and its preparatory period. “She, the Mother of Fairest Love, will be for Christians on the way to the Great Jubilee of the third Millennium the Star which safely guides their steps to the Lord. May the unassuming Young Woman of Nazareth, who two thousand years ago offered to the world the Incarnate Word, lead the men and women of the new millennium towards the One who is ‘the true light that enlightens every man’ (Jn. 1:9)” (CTM 59).

Bibliography:


**MSA 1997 Meeting in San Antonio**

The Mariological Society of America’s 48th annual program will be at the Oblate Renewal Center, San Antonio, Texas, May 21-23, 1997. The theme for the meeting is derived from Pope John Paul’s encyclical *That All May Be One*. In the encyclical, the pope lists several areas “in need of fuller study before a true consensus of faith can be achieved,” and among these are “the Virgin Mary, as Mother of God and Icon of the Church, the spiritual Mother who intercedes for Christ’s disciples and for all humanity” (79).

Msgr. John Rodano of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity will give the keynote address. Other speakers will be Fr. George Kirwin, O.M.I., Dr. Ross Mackenzie, Fr. George Tavard, Bro. Donald Boccardi. A part of the program will be a panel composed of Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Methodist, and Baptist theologians responding to the program’s theme. For the complete program, call/write the MSA Secretariat, Marian Library, (937) 229-4294.
Apparitions in the News.

Many visions and miracles are recorded in the Scriptures. After the Resurrection, Christ appeared to "Peter and then to the Twelve" (I Cor. 15:5). Paul spoke of "visions and revelations" from the Lord (II Cor. 12:1-6), and the deacon Stephen saw the heavens open and Christ at the right hand of God the Father (Acts 7:55-56).

Christ worked many miracles of healing, but, at the same time, he did not appear to encourage the search for miracles. "An evil and unfaithful generation seeks a sign, but no sign will be given them except the sign of Jonah" (Mt. 16:4). In the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Christ announces that no messenger from the next world will be sent to the brothers of the rich man to have them repent. "If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead" (Lk. 17:31). Finally, we have Christ's words to Thomas after the apostle placed his hand on the side of the risen Lord. "Have you come to believe because you have seen? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed" (Jn. 20:29).

Similarly, throughout Christian history, there has been the grateful reception of miracles and apparitions when they occur, together with the acknowledgment that such phenomena are not a substitute for faith in God. The Church preserves the centrality and final revelation given in the person, acts, and words of Jesus Christ, while at the same time honoring the special insights of the saints many of whom received messages through apparitions. The Church takes the middle course between an empiricism which would a priori reject the miraculous and a credulity phenomenon before public worship could take place. Prospero Lambertini (1675-1758), the future Benedict XIV, provided several rules for discernment of private revelations and the miracles needed with the canonization of saints. Such events must present themselves to human reason as being truly extraordinary and beyond the scope of natural causes.

The Code of Canon Law of 1917 (1399, #5) forbade the publication of anything about "new apparitions, revelations, visions, prophecies, and miracles" without the local bishop's approbation. In 1969, Paul VI, implementing Vatican II's statement on the right of the mass media to information, lifted the requirement that all writings about apparitions needed ecclesiastical approval before publication.

Since 1969, and especially after 1981 (the beginning of the alleged apparitions at Medjugorje), reports of apparitions are frequent, "numerous and even disturbing," in the words of Fr. René Laurentin at a recent conference at Czestochowa. "Eye-witness" television cameras quickly transmit reports of alleged apparitions across the world.

"Visions multiply by imitation" (Tavard), that is, a well-known apparition seems to encourage reports of similar ones. There were 210 claims of Marian apparitions between 1928 and 1971 (Carroll, Theotokos), and in the last few years there are claims of over 200 Marian apparitions. New Age and Christian bookstores now have almost as many books on apparitions and miracles as they have on angels.

The discernment of apparitions and miracles is the responsibility of the local bishop, and ordinarily the Vatican does not become involved in the process. However, two items show the Vatican's concern about the issue. The Activities of the Holy See (1996) noted that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was studying "a phenomenon of very vast significance, that of alleged apparitions [which are] frequently joined with claims of supernatural messages and with weeping statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary or of saints." It is the right and responsibility of local bishops to investigate and make judgments about alleged apparitions; at the same time, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has an obligation of "guidance and vigilance."

Apparitions were also noted in the study document for the Special Assembly for America of the Synod of Bishops (Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: Way to Conversion, Communion and Solidarity). The document acknowledges that in some places, apparitions are a cause of division within the local church. "Within the church community, the multiplication of supposed 'apparitions' or 'visions' is sowing confusion and reveals a certain lack of a solid basis to the faith and Christian life among her members. On the other hand, these negative aspects in their own way reveal a certain thirst for spiritual things which, if properly channeled, can be the point of departure for a conversion to faith in Christ" (33).

In a recent interview at Fatima, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger spoke about visions and apparitions: "To all the curious, I would say I am certain that the Virgin does not engage in sensationalism; she does not create fear. She does not present apocalyptic visions, but guides people to her Son. And this is what is essential."

Cardinal Ratzinger is one of the few who has read the much-discussed third secret of Fatima. It is not, he said, "sensational or apocalyptic." He continued, "Preoccupation with the message and its presumed predictions of catastrophe are not part of a healthy Marian devotion. The Madonna did not appear to children, to the small, to the simple, to those unknown in the world in order to create a sensation." Mary's purpose "is, through these simple ones, to call the world back to simplicity, that is, to the essentials: conversion, prayer, and the sacraments."
Marian Anniversaries

—The 100th anniversary of the beginning of the restoration of the Marian shrine at Walsingham, England. The Marian shrine of Walsingham originated in the eleventh century and was the most important site of pilgrimage in medieval England. In 1897, a church was built at King's Lynn, and a statue of Mary, similar to the medieval one, was installed. In the same year, a pilgrimage was organized, the first since the Reformation. Today the main sanctuary is Anglican, containing an Orthodox chapel inaugurated by the Russian Orthodox bishop in Paris in the 1930s. A short distance away is the small Gothic chapel that survived the destruction of the monasteries, the Chapel of the Slipper, which is now the Catholic shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham. Thus Walsingham has become an ecumenical place of pilgrimage where members of the diverse churches may, in their very division, experience unity as they praise the works of God in the mother of Christ, a model of faith and love for the whole Christian community and for every believer.” Martin Gillet (1902–1980), founder of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary, did much to promote the restoration of the shrine.

—The 75th anniversary of the founding of the Legion of Mary by Frank Duff in Dublin, 1921. The Legion is present in 2,000 dioceses of the world. At Vatican II, Frank Duff received an ovation from the world's bishops for his understanding and promotion of the "lay apostolate." Following St. Louis Grignion de Montfort's *True Devotion to the Virgin Mary*, members of the Legion are devoted to Mary and do "substantial apostolic work" each week in a spirit of faith. Edel Quinn, who worked for the Legion in Africa, has been declared "Venerable" by Pope John Paul II, and, in 1996, the Archbishop of Dublin signed the official petition to introduce the cause for the canonization of Frank Duff (died in 1980).

—The 50th anniversary of the founding of the Blue Army in October, 1947, by Msgr. Harold Colgan at St. Mary's Church, Plainfield, New Jersey. In thanksgiving for a restoration to health and for the revitalizing of his parish, Msgr. Colgan founded the Blue Army, now known as the World Apostolate of Fatima, for the purpose of spreading the message of Fatima. John Haffert, a noted writer and lecturer on the scapular, became the principal promoter for the new organization and gained the approval of Bishop da Silva of Leira, Portugal, for the continuous pilgrimage of the Pilgrim Virgin of Fatima. The organization has representation in Australia, Austria, Holland, and other countries. Two current projects for the organization are the National Rosary Crusade of the Americas (which claims 1,000,000 participants) and the Pilgrim Virgin Evangelization 2000 program.

Queen of Families

The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments informed the bishops of the world (December 31, 1995) of a new invocation for the Litany of Loreto—"Queen of families, pray for us." The Litany of Loreto was first sung at the shrine of the Loreto in the early sixteenth century. In the last two centuries, six titles have been added to this prayer: "Queen conceived without original sin" (Pius IX, 1854); "Queen of the Holy Rosary" (Leo XIII, 1883); "Mother of Good Counsel" (Leo XIII, 1903); "Queen of Peace" (Benedict XV, 1916); "Mother of the Church" (John Paul II, 1980); "Queen of Families" (John Paul II, 1995).

In 1964, four hundred bishops petitioned the Holy See for the inclusion of this title in the Litany of Loreto. In 1977, the Schoenstatt Family made the same request to the Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship. During the recent International Year of the Family, many bishops and lay organizations requested that some invocation be proposed which would show Mary's relation to the family of Nazareth. In the apostolic exhortation *Familias consortio*, John Paul II had written, "May the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, be also mother of the family church.' Through her maternal help, may every Christian family be a 'little church' in which the mystery of Christ is relived.”
News about News:

The Mary Page

The Mary Page has been listed in Catholics on the Web, a listing of 500 sites that have a special relevance for those interested in the Church. The Mary Page has been “hit” more than 60,000 times in its 18-month existence. The Mary Page can be reached at http://www.udayton.edu/mary.

One-third of the national page of The New York Times of January 31 was devoted to a story about the Marian Library written by Gustav Niebuhr, the paper’s religion editor. The story was picked up by papers in Los Angeles (CA), San Jose (CA), Cincinnati (OH), Barre (VT), Astoria (OR), Pittsburgh (PA), Rutland (VT), Tampa (FL) and Calcutta, India [thanks to Delmar Jorn, S.M., for the clipping]. In addition, reporters from Austrian National Radio and the Tampa WFLA-TV came for stories.

News breeds news.

The Holy See inaugurated a Vatican presence on the World Wide Web on Easter Sunday, 1997. The Vatican site—http://www.vatican.va—features all new Church documents in six languages. The Vatican site is maintained through three powerful servers, which, as Dr. Navarro-Valls explained, are named “Raphael” (guarding the content of the site), “Michael” (protecting and acting as backup), and “Gabriel the messenger” (the e-mail correspondence site).

“Whoever loves his life in the world will lose it, and whoever hates his life in the world will keep it for ever.”

— John 12:25

Immaculate Heart of Mary

In response to requests from dioceses, religious communities and lay people throughout the world, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments on January 1, 1996, raised the liturgical commemoration of the Immaculate Heart of Mary from an optional to an obligatory memorial in the General Roman Calendar. The celebration falls on the day (always a Saturday) after the feast of the Sacred Heart, which is the Friday after Corpus Christi. The placement of the commemoration indicates the connection with the mystery of the divine Heart of Jesus.

Marian Update

St. Louis-Mary Grignon de Montfort

Pope John Paul II directed that the name of St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort be inserted in the General Roman Calendar (as an optional commemoration) on April 28, the day of his death in 1716. He made the decision based on the contribution which the writings and example of St. Louis-Mary have made not only to “doctrine [but also] to Christian living.” The new collect captures the saint’s spirituality: “God of eternal wisdom, you made St. Louis Mary an outstanding witness and teacher of total dedication (deditio) to Christ, your Son, through the hands of the blessed Mary. Grant that we who follow that same spiritual path, may be able to extend your reign in this world.” In the Office of Readings, there is a selection from the saint’s True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

“Two thousand years ago the Son of God was made man by the power of the Holy Spirit and was born of the Immaculate Virgin Mary. The Marian Year was as it were an anticipation of the Jubilee, and contained much of what will find fuller expression in the Year 2000” (John Paul II, The Coming Third Millennium, 26).
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