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Pope Benedict XVI

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September 1, 2006 to September 24, 2006



2006

September 1, 2006: Shrine of the Holy Face in Manoppello, Italy

But let us now address a thought of special devotion to the "Queen of all the saints," the Virgin Mary, whom you venerate in the various shrines and chapels scattered across the valleys and mountains of the Abruzzi region. May Our Lady, in whose face -- more than in any other creature -- we can recognize the features of the Incarnate Word, watch over the families and parishes and over the cities and nations of the whole world.

May the Mother of the Creator also help us to respect nature, a great gift of God that we can admire here, looking at the marvelous mountains surrounding us. This gift, however, is exposed more and more to the serious risks of environmental deterioration and must therefore be defended and protected. This is urgently necessary, as Archbishop Forte noted and as is appropriately highlighted by the Day of Reflection and Prayer for the Safeguarding of Creation, which is being celebrated by the Church in Italy this very day.

September 3, 2006: Castel Gandolfo

Let us pray to the Virgin Mary that the example and teaching of St. Gregory the Great may be followed by the pastors of the Church and also by leaders of civil institutions.

September 9-14, 2006: Vatican City

Accompany me, dear friends, on my visit, which I entrust to the Holy Virgin. ... May she guide my steps: May she obtain for the German people a renewed springtime of faith and civil progress.

September 10, 2006: Munich, Germany

Holy Mother of the Lord!

Our ancestors, at a time of trouble, set up your statue here, in the very heart of Munich, and entrusted the city and country to your care. They wanted to meet you again and again along the paths of their daily life, and to learn from you the right way to live, to find God and to live in harmony.

They gave you a crown and a scepter, which at that time were symbols of dominion over the country, because they knew that power and dominion would then be in good hands -- in the hands of a Mother.

Your Son, just before his farewell to his disciples, said to them: "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all" (Mark 10:43-44).

At the decisive hour in your own life, you said: "Here I am, the servant of the Lord" (Luke 1:38). You lived your whole life as service. And you continue to do so throughout history.

At Cana, you silently and discreetly interceded for the spouses, and so you continue to do. You take upon yourself people's needs and concerns, and you bring them before the Lord, before your Son. Your power is goodness. Your power is service.

Teach us -- great and small alike -- to carry out our responsibilities in the same way. Help us to find the strength to offer reconciliation and forgiveness. Help us to become patient and humble, but also free and courageous, just as you were at the hour of the cross.

In your arms you hold Jesus, the child who blesses, the child who is also the Lord of the world. By holding the child who blesses, you have yourself become a blessing.

Bless us, this city and this country! Show us Jesus, the blessed fruit of your womb! Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen!

September 11, 2006: Basilica of St. Anne

Before concluding our Eucharistic celebration with the solemn blessing, let us recollect ourselves by praying the Angelus. In reflecting on the readings of the Mass, we have realized how necessary it is -- both for the lives of individuals and for a serene and peaceful coexistence with others -- to see God as the center of all there is and the center of our personal lives.

The supreme example of this attitude is Mary, Mother of the Lord. Throughout her earthly life, she was the woman who listened, the virgin whose heart was open toward God and toward others. The faithful have understood this since the earliest centuries of Christianity, and therefore in all their needs and trials they have confidently turned to her, imploring her help and her intercession with God.

As a witness to this, here in our Bavarian homeland there are hundreds of churches and shrines dedicated to Mary. They are places to which countless pilgrims come flocking throughout the year, to entrust themselves to her maternal love and concern.

Here in Munich, in the heart of the city, rises the Mariensaeule, before which, exactly 390 years ago, Bavaria was solemnly entrusted to the protection of the Mother of God. And yesterday, in this same place, I too implored once more the blessing of the "Patrona Bavariae" upon this city and upon this land.

And how can we not think in a special way of the shrine of Altoetting, where I will go tomorrow on pilgrimage? There I will have the joy of solemnly inaugurating the new adoration chapel which, precisely in that place, is an eloquent sign of Mary's role: She is and remains the handmaid of the Lord who never puts herself at the center, but wishes to guide us toward God, to teach us a way of life in which God is acknowledged as the center of all there is and the center of our personal lives. To her let us now address our prayer.

On Mary the Patroness of Bavaria: "She Is and Remains the Handmaid of the Lord." Munich Germany, September 10, 2006.

We have gathered here to consider our vocation to serve Jesus Christ and, under the watchful gaze of St. Anne, in whose home the greatest vocation in the history of salvation developed, to understand it better. Mary received her vocation from the lips of an angel. The angel does not enter our room visibly, but the Lord has a plan for each of us, he calls each one of us by name. Our task is to learn how to listen, to perceive his call, to be courageous and faithful in following him and, when all is said and done, to be found trustworthy servants who have used well the gifts given us. ...

With this petition we knock on God's door; but with the same petition the Lord is also knocking on the doors of our own heart. Lord do you want me? Is it not perhaps too big for me? Am I too small for this? Do not be afraid, the angel said to Mary. Do not fear: I have called you by name, God says through the

Prophet Isaiah (43:1) to us -- to each of us.

...

Here in this basilica, our thoughts turn to Mary, who lived her life fully with Jesus and consequently was, and continues to be, close to all men and women. The many votive plaques are a concrete sign of this. Let us think of Mary's holy mother, St. Anne, and with her let us also think of the importance of mothers and fathers, of grandmothers and grandfathers, and the importance of the family as an environment of life and prayer, where we learn to pray and where vocations are able to develop.

September 11, 2006: Mary Leaves Everything to the Lord's Judgment.

In today's First Reading, Responsorial Psalm and Gospel, three times and in three different ways, we see Mary, the Mother of the Lord, as a woman of prayer. In the Book of Acts we find her in the midst of the community of the apostles gathered in the Upper Room, praying that the Lord, now ascended to the Father, will fulfill his promise: Within a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit (1:5).

Mary leads the nascent Church in prayer; she is, as it were in person, the Church at prayer. And thus, along with the great community of the saints and at their center, she stands even today before God interceding for us, asking her Son to send his Spirit once more upon the Church and to renew the face of the earth.

Our response to this reading is to sing with Mary the great hymn of praise which she raises after Elizabeth calls her blessed because of her faith. It is a prayer of thanksgiving, of joy in God, of blessing for his mighty works. The tenor of this hymn is clear from its very first words: My soul magnifies -- makes great -- the Lord. Making the Lord great means giving him a place in the world, in our lives, and letting him enter into our time and our activity: Ultimately this is the essence of true prayer. Where God is made great, men and women are not made small: There too men and women become great and the world is filled with light.

In the Gospel passage, Mary makes a request of her Son on behalf of some friends in need. At first sight, this could appear to be an entirely human conversation between a Mother and her Son and it is indeed a dialogue rich in humanity. Yet Mary does not speak to Jesus as if he were a mere man on whose ability and helpfulness she can count. She entrusts a human need to his power -- to a power which is more than skill and human ability.

In this dialogue with Jesus, we actually see her as a Mother who asks, one who intercedes. As we listen to this Gospel passage, it is worth going a little deeper, not only to understand Jesus and Mary better, but also to learn from Mary the right way to pray.

Mary does not really ask something of Jesus: She simply says to him: They have no wine (John 2:3).

Weddings in the Holy Land were celebrated for a whole week; the entire town took part, and consequently much wine was consumed. Now the wedding couple find themselves in trouble, and Mary simply says this to Jesus. She doesn't tell Jesus what to do. She doesn't ask for anything in particular, and she certainly doesn't ask him to perform a miracle to make wine. She simply hands the matter over to Jesus and leaves him to decide what to do.

In the straightforward words of the Mother of Jesus, then, we can see two things: on the one hand her affectionate concern for people, that maternal affection which makes her aware of the problems of others. We see her heartfelt goodness and her willingness to help. This is the Mother that generations of people have come here to Altoetting to visit. To her we entrust our cares, our needs and our troubles. Her maternal readiness to help, in which we trust, appears here for the first time in the holy Scriptures.

But in addition to this first aspect, with which we are all familiar, there is another, which we could easily overlook: Mary leaves everything to the Lord's judgment. At Nazareth she gave over her will, immersing it in the will of God: Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word (Luke 1:38). And this continues to be her fundamental attitude.

This is how she teaches us to pray: not by seeking to affirm our own will and our own desires before God, but by letting him decide what he wants to do. From Mary we learn graciousness and readiness to help, but we also learn humility and generosity in accepting God's will, in the confident conviction that whatever he says in response will be best for us.

If all this helps us to understand Mary's attitude and her words, we still find it hard to understand Jesus' answer. In the first place, we don't like the way he addresses her: Woman. Why doesn't he say: Mother? But this title really expresses Mary's place in salvation history. It points to the future, to the hour of the crucifixion, when Jesus will say to her: Woman, behold your son -- Son, behold your mother (cf. John 19:26-27). It anticipates the hour when he will make the woman, his Mother, the Mother of all his disciples.

On the other hand, the title Woman recalls the account of the creation of Eve: Adam, surrounded by

creation in all its magnificence, experiences loneliness as a human being. Then Eve is created, and in her Adam finds the companion whom he longed for; and he gives her the name woman. In the Gospel of John, then, Mary represents the new, the definitive woman, the companion of the Redeemer, our Mother: The name, which seemed so lacking in affection, actually expresses the grandeur of Mary's mission.

Yet we like even less the other part of Jesus' answer to Mary at Cana: Woman, what have I to do with you? My hour has not yet come (John 2:4). We want to object: You have a lot to do with her! It was Mary who gave you flesh and blood, who gave you your body, and not only your body: With the yes which rose from the depths of her heart she bore you in her womb and with a mother's love she gave you life and introduced you to the community of the people of Israel.

If this is our response to Jesus, then we are already well along the way toward understanding his answer. Because all this should remind us that in holy Scripture we find a parallelism between Mary's dialogue with the Archangel Gabriel, where she says: Let it be with me according to your word (Luke 1:38), and the passage of the Letter to the Hebrews which cites the words of Psalm 40 about the dialogue between Father and Son -- the dialogue which results in the Incarnation. The Eternal Son says to the Father: Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me. ... See, I have come to do your will, O God (Hebrews 10:5-7; cf. Psalm 40:6-8).

The yes of the Son: I have come to do your will, and the yes of Mary: Let it be with me according to your word -- this double yes becomes a single yes, and thus the Word becomes flesh in Mary. In this double yes the obedience of the Son is embodied, and Mary gives him that body. Woman, what have I to do with you? Ultimately, what each has to do with the other is found in this double yes which resulted in the Incarnation.

It is to this point of profound unity that the Lord is referring. Here, in this common yes to the will of the Father, an answer is found. We too need to progress toward this point; and there we will find the answer to our questions.

If we take this as our starting point, we can also understand the second part of Jesus' answer: My hour has not yet come. Jesus never acts completely alone, and never for the sake of pleasing others. The Father is always the starting point of his actions, and this is what unites him to Mary, because she wished to make her request in this same unity of will with the Father.

And so, surprisingly, after hearing Jesus' answer, which apparently refuses her request, she can simply say to the servants: Do whatever he tells you (John 2:5). Jesus is not a wonder-worker, he does not play games with his power in what is, after all, a private affair. He gives a sign, in which he proclaims his hour, the hour of the wedding feast, the hour of union between God and man.

He does not merely make wine, but transforms the human wedding feast into an image of the divine wedding feast, to which the Father invites us through the Son and in which he gives us every good thing. The wedding feast becomes an image of the Cross, where God showed his love to the end, giving himself in his Son in flesh and blood -- in the Son who instituted the sacrament in which he gives himself to us for all time. Thus a human problem is solved in a way that is truly divine and the initial request is superabundantly granted. Jesus' hour has not yet arrived, but in the sign of the water changed into wine, in the sign of the festive gift, he even now anticipates that hour.

Jesus' definitive hour will be his return at the end of time. Yet he continually anticipates this hour in the Eucharist, in which, even now, he always comes to us. And he does this ever anew through the intercession of his Mother, through the intercession of the Church, which cries out to him in the Eucharistic prayers: Come, Lord Jesus!

In the Canon of the Mass, the Church constantly prays for this hour to be anticipated, asking that he may come even now and be given to us. And so we want to let ourselves be guided by Mary, by the Mother of Graces of Altoetting, by the Mother of all the faithful, toward the hour of Jesus.

Let us ask him for the gift of a deeper knowledge and understanding of him. And may our reception of him not be reduced to the moment of communion alone. Jesus remains present in the sacred Host and he awaits us constantly. Here in Altoetting, the adoration of the Lord in the Eucharist has found a new location in the old treasury. Mary and Jesus go together.

Through Mary we want to continue our converse with the Lord and to learn how to receive him better. Holy Mother of God, pray for us, just as at Cana you prayed for the bride and the bridegroom! Guide us toward Jesus -- ever anew! Amen!

September 11, 2006: Mariensäule

It is particularly moving for me to be in this most beautiful square again at the foot of the Mariensäule, a place that, as has just been mentioned, on two other occasions has witnessed decisive changes for my life. Here, as mentioned, almost 30 years ago, the faithful welcomed me with joy and I placed in the

Virgin's hands the journey I was to undertake, as the step from a university chair to the service of archbishop of Munich and Freising was an enormous leap.

Only with this protection and with the evident love of the inhabitants of Munich and Bavaria did I dare to assume that ministry, succeeding Cardinal Döpfner. Then, in 1982, I bid farewell here. Present was the archbishop of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Hamer, who would later be cardinal, and I said to him: "The inhabitants of Munich are like the Neapolitans, they want to touch the archbishop, they love him." He was impressed to see here, in Munich, so much cordialness, to be able to know the Bavarian heart in this place, in which I, once again, entrusted myself to the Virgin. ...

And so I find myself again at the foot of the Mariensäule, imploring the intercession and blessing of the Mother of God, not only for the city of Munich and for my beloved Bavaria, but for the universal Church and for all people of good will.

September 12, 2006: Regensburg, Germany

Today we celebrate the feast of the "Most Holy Name of Mary." To all those women who bear that name -- my own mother and my sister were among them -- I offer my heartfelt good wishes for their feast day. Mary, the Mother of the Lord, has received from the faithful the title of Advocate, for she is our advocate before God.

And this is how we see her, from the wedding-feast of Cana onward: as a woman who is kindly, filled with maternal concern and love, a woman who is attentive to the needs of others and, out of desire to help them, brings those needs before the Lord.

In today's Gospel we have heard how the Lord gave Mary as a Mother to the beloved disciple and, in him, to all of us. In every age, Christians have received with gratitude this legacy of Jesus, and, in their recourse to his Mother, they have always found the security and confident hope which gives them joy in God. May we too receive Mary as the lodestar guiding our lives, introducing us into the great family of God! Truly, those who believe are never alone. Amen!

September 17, 2006: Castel Gandolfo

Now, before reciting the Marian prayer, I wish to reflect on two recent and important liturgical feasts: the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, celebrated on Sept. 14, and the memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows, celebrated the day after. These two liturgical celebrations summarize in a visual manner the image of the Crucifixion, which represents the Virgin Mary at the foot of the Cross, according to the description of the Evangelist John, the only Apostle who stayed with Jesus at the hour of his death.

But, what does it mean to "exalt" the Cross? Is it not, perhaps, scandalous to venerate an offensive gibbet? The Apostle Paul says: "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:23). Christians, however, do not exalt any cross, but that cross which Jesus sanctified with his sacrifice, fruit and testimony of immense love.

Christ, on the cross, shed all his blood to free humanity from the slavery of sin and death. For this reason, the cross was transformed from a sign of malediction to a sign of blessing, from a symbol of death to a symbol par excellence of the love that is able to overcome hatred and violence and that generates immortal life. "O Crux, ave spes unica! O cross, our only hope," sings the liturgy.

The evangelist writes: At the foot of the Cross was Mary (cf. John 19:25-27). Her sorrow is one with that of her son. It is a sorrow full of faith and love. On Calvary the Virgin participated in the salvific power of Christ's sorrow, uniting her "fiat" with that of her son.

Dear brothers and sisters: Spiritually united to Our Lady of Sorrows, let us also renew our "yes" to God, who chose the way of the cross to save us. It is a great mystery which still takes place until the end of the world and that also calls for our cooperation. May Mary help us to pick up our cross every day and to follow Jesus faithfully on the path of obedience, sacrifice and love.

September 14, 2006: City of Freising

The first stage was the city of Munich, known as "the metropolis with a heart" ("Weltstadt mit Herz"). In its historical center is the "Marienplatz," Mary's Square, in which arises the "Mariensaeule," the Virgin's Column, at the summit of which is the golden bronze statue of Mary.

I wished to begin my stay with the homage to the Patroness of Bavaria, as for me it has a highly significant value: In that square and before that Marian image, I was welcomed as archbishop some 30 years ago and I began my Episcopal mission with a prayer to Mary; I returned there at the end of my mandate, before leaving for Rome. This time I wished to place myself once again at the foot of the "Mariensaeule" to implore the intercession and blessing of the Mother of God, not only for the city of Munich and for Bavaria, but for the whole Church and the entire world.

... Together, we celebrated Vespers in the historic cathedral, known as "Our Lady's Cathedral," where the relics of St. Benno are kept, patron of the city, in which I was ordained bishop in 1977. ...

The day of Monday, September 11, was dedicated in large part to the visit to Altoetting, in the Diocese of Passau.

This small city is known as the "heart of Bavaria" ("Herz Bayerns"), and there is kept the "Black Virgin," venerated in the "Gnadenkapelle" (Chapel of Graces), the object of numerous pilgrimages from Germany and nations of Central Europe. ... With the numerous faithful present at the holy Mass, celebrated in the square next to the shrine, we reflected together on Mary's role in the work of salvation to learn from her helpful kindness, humility and the generous acceptance of the divine will.

Mary leads us to Jesus: This truth was even more visible, at the end of the divine Sacrifice, with the procession in which with the statue of the Virgin we went to the chapel of Eucharistic adoration ("Anbetungskapelle"), inaugurated on this occasion. The day closed with solemn Marian Vespers in the Basilica of St. Anne of Altoetting, with the presence of religious of Bavaria, together with members of the Work for Vocations.

... In the morning of the following day, September 13, in the "Alte Kapelle" ("Old Chapel") of Regensburg, in which the miraculous image of Mary is kept, painted according to local tradition by the Evangelist Luke, I presided over a brief liturgy on the occasion of the blessing of the new organ.

Castel Gandolfo, 15 September 2006 - Benedict XVI's Letter to Cardinal Szoka upon his retirement

I entrust you to the special protection of the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, and as I assure you of my special remembrance in prayer in the hope of abundant divine rewards and as a pledge of my fraternal closeness, I warmly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, which I gladly extend to all the personnel of the Governorate of Vatican City State and to your loved ones.

September 20, 2006: Vatican City

May Mary, Mother of the Church, help us to open our hearts and minds to the One who is "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:16). ...

[At the end of the audience, the Pope greeted pilgrims in several languages. In English, he said:]

... In Munich's central square, I implored the Virgin's blessing upon the whole world. The following day I spoke of a certain difficulty in hearing God in a secular world which needs so much the Gospel's message of hope.

At Altoetting we reflected on Mary's generosity in accepting God's will, recalling how she guides us towards Jesus.

...

September 23, 2006-Papal Address to Bishops in Formation Course

I will continue to feel united with you in spirit and I ask you to convey the assurance of my affection and closeness in prayer to your Communities, upon which I invoke the motherly protection of Mary Most Holy, Star of Evangelization, and the intercession of St Pius of Pietrelcina, whose liturgical memorial we are celebrating today.

September 24, 2006: Castel Gandolfo, Italy

Mary, whom we invoke this day as Our Lady of Mercy, helps us to open our heart ever more to the love of God, mystery of joy and sanctity. ...

May Our Lady, Star of the Sea, look down in love upon seafarers and their families and upon all those who care for their human and spiritual needs.