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Pope Benedict XVI

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September 2008



At the Shrine of Bonaria in Cagliari, Sardinia – Angelus Address September 8, 2008

... On Oct. 20, 1985, our beloved John Paul II also paused for prayer before the sacred effigy of Our Lady. In the footsteps of the Popes who preceded me, I have also chosen the Shrine of Bonaria to carry out a pastoral visit that ideally intends to embrace the whole of Sardinia.

To Mary we have renewed the entrustment of the city of Cagliari, of Sardinia and of every one of its inhabitants. May the Holy Virgin continue to watch over one and all, so that the patrimony of the evangelical values will be transmitted integrally to the new generations, so that Christ will reign in families, in communities and in the different realms of society. In particular, may Our Lady protect all those who, at this time, are in most need of her maternal intervention: the children and young people, the elderly and families, the sick and all those who are suffering.

Conscious of the important role that Mary plays in the life of each one of us, we celebrate her birth today as devoted children. This event constitutes a fundamental stage for the Family of Nazareth, cradle of our redemption, an event that touches all of us, because every gift that God has given her, the Mother, he has given thinking also of each one of us, her children. Hence, with immense gratitude, we ask Mary, Mother of the incarnate Word and our Mother, to protect every earthly mother: those that, together with their husbands, educate their children in a harmonious family context, and those that, for so many reasons, find themselves alone in facing such an arduous task. May all be able to carry out with dedication and fidelity their daily service in the family, the Church, and society. May Our Lady be sustenance, comfort and hope for all!

Under Mary's gaze, I wish to remember the dear people of Haiti, harshly tried in past days in the wake of no less than three hurricanes. I pray for the victims, unfortunately numerous, and for the homeless. I am close to the whole nation and I hope that it will receive as soon as possible the necessary aid. I entrust all to the maternal protection of Our Lady of Bonaria.

Papal Message Ahead of France Trip – General Audience on September 10 at the Vatican directed especially to the people of France

...

Next Friday I will begin my first pastoral journey to France as Successor of Peter. ... On this occasion, the reason for my trip is the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Lourdes. After visiting Paris, your country's capital, I will have the great joy to join the crowd of pilgrims who are going to follow the stages of the jubilee journey, after St. Bernadette, to the Massabielle grotto.

My prayer will intensify at the feet of Our Lady for the intentions of the whole Church, in particular for the sick, the abandoned, as well as for peace in the world.

May Mary be for all of you, in particular for young people, the Mother always attentive to the needs of her children, a light of hope that illuminates and guides your ways!

Dear friends of France. I invite you to join me in prayer so that this trip will bring abundant fruits. In the joyous expectation of being among you soon, I invoke upon each one of you, on your families and communities, the maternal protection of the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Lourdes. May God bless you!

"I Am Going to Find the Love of the Mother" - Press Conference With the Pope while en route to France on September 12, 2008

...

Q: You are going on a pilgrimage to Lourdes. What does it mean for you? Have you been there before?

Benedict XVI: I was in Lourdes on the occasion of the Eucharistic Congress, in 1981, after the assassination attempt on the Holy Father (John Paul II). And Cardinal Gantin was the delegate of the Holy Father. It is a very beautiful memory for me.

The feast of St. Bernadette is also my birthday. Because of this, I feel very close to this small saint, this young, pure, humble woman that spoke with the Virgin Mary.

It is very important for me to experience this reality, this presence of the Virgin Mary in our lifetime, to see the path of this young person who was a friend of the Virgin Mary, and on the other hand to meet the Blessed Virgin, her mother. Naturally we are not going there to see miracles. I am going to find the love of the Mother, which is the true cure for every pain and to be united to those who suffer, in the love of the Blessed Mother. This seems to me an important sign for our times.

Pope's Address to French Politicians - Elysée Palace on September 12, 2008

... The principal reason for my visit is the 150th anniversary of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary at Lourdes. It is my desire to join the multitude of countless pilgrims from the whole world who during this year are converging on the Marian shrine, filled with faith and love. It is this faith and this love that I will celebrate here in your land during these four days of grace which have been granted to me.

... Mr President, dear friends, I wish to express once again my gratitude for this gathering. Be assured of my fervent prayers for your beautiful country, that God may grant her peace and prosperity, freedom and unity, equality and fraternity. I entrust these prayers to the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary, principal patron of France. May God bless France and all her people!

Spontane Grußworte des Papstes an Jugendliche in einer Pariser Nacht – September 12, 2008

... Ich freue mich darüber, mich morgen der Schar der Lourdes-Pilger anzuschließen, um das Jubiläum der Erscheinungen der Jungfrau Maria zu feiern. Die Katholiken in Frankreich haben es mehr denn je nötig, ihr Vertrauen in Maria zu erneuern und in ihr das Vorbild für ihren Einsatz im Dienst am Evangelium zu erkennen. Aber bevor ich nach Lourdes aufbreche, erwarte ich euch alle morgen Vormittag bei der Eucharistiefeier auf der Esplanade des Invalides.

Ich zähle auf euch und euer Gebet, damit diese Reise Frucht bringt. Die Jungfrau Maria schütze euch! Aus ganzem Herzen erteile ich euch den Apostolischen Segen.

Pope's Vespers Address to the clergy and consecrated persons at Notre Dame – Paris September 13, 2008

... Art, as a pathway to God, and choral prayer, the Church's praise of the Creator, helped Paul Claudel, who attended Vespers here on Christmas Day 1886, to find the way to a personal experience of God. It is significant that God filled his soul with light during the chanting of the Magnificat, in which the Church

listens to the song of the Virgin Mary, the Patroness of this church, who reminds the world that the Almighty has lifted up the lowly (cf. *Lk* 1:52). ...

God's Word, the Eternal Word, who was with him from the beginning (cf. *Jn* 1:1), was born of a woman, born a subject of the law, in order to redeem the subjects of the law, "to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (cf. *Gal* 4:4-5). The Son of God took flesh in the womb of a woman, a virgin. ... Dear brothers and sisters, in Our Lady we have the finest example of fidelity to God's word. Her great fidelity found fulfillment in the Incarnation; with absolute confidence, Mary can say: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word!" (*Lk* 1:38). Our evening prayer is about to take up the Magnificat, the song of her whom all generations will call blessed. Mary believed in the fulfillment of the words the Lord had spoken to her (cf. *Lk* 1:45); she hoped against all hope in the resurrection of her Son; and so great was her love for humanity that she was given to us as our Mother (cf. *Jn* 19:27). Thus we see that "Mary is completely at home with the word of God; with ease she moves in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with the word of God; the word of God becomes her word, and her word issues from the word of God" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 41). To her, then, we can say with confidence, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, our Mother, teach us to believe, to hope, to love with you. Show us the way to his Kingdom!" (*Spe Salvi*, 50). Amen.

Benedict XVI's Homily in Lourdes – September 14, 2008

... "Go and tell the priests that people should come here in procession, and that a chapel should be built here." This is the message Bernadette received from the "beautiful lady" in the apparition of March 2, 1858. For 150 years, pilgrims have never ceased to come to the grotto of Massabielle to hear the message of conversion and hope which is addressed to them. And we have done the same; here we are this morning at the feet of Mary, the Immaculate Virgin, eager to learn from her alongside little Bernadette.

I would like to thank especially Bishop Jacques Perrier of Tarbes and Lourdes for the warm welcome he has given me and for the kind words he has addressed to me. I greet the Cardinals, the Bishops, the priests, the deacons, the men and women religious, and all of you, dear Lourdes pilgrims, especially the sick. You have come in large numbers to make this Jubilee pilgrimage with me and to entrust your families, your relatives and friends, and all your intentions to Our Lady. My thanks go also to the civil and military authorities who are here with us at this Eucharistic celebration.

... "What a great thing it is to possess the Cross! ... This is the great mystery that Mary also entrusts to us this morning, inviting us to turn towards her Son. In fact, it is significant that, during the first apparition to Bernadette, Mary begins the encounter with the sign of the Cross. More than a simple sign, it is an initiation into the mysteries of the faith that Bernadette receives from Mary. The sign of the Cross is a kind of synthesis of our faith, for it tells how much God loves us; it tells us that there is a love in this world that is stronger than death, stronger than our weaknesses and sins. The power of love is stronger than the evil which threatens us. It is this mystery of the universality of God's love for men that Mary came to reveal here, in Lourdes. She invites all people of good will, all those who suffer in heart or body, to raise their eyes towards the Cross of Jesus, so as to discover there the source of life, the source of salvation.

... We entrust all this to Mary, mother of Jesus and our mother, present at the foot of the Cross. In order to welcome into our lives this glorious Cross, the celebration of the Jubilee of Our Lady's apparitions in Lourdes urges us to embark upon a journey of faith and conversion. Today, Mary comes to meet us, so as to show us the way towards a renewal of life for our communities and for each one of us. By welcoming her Son, whom she presents to us, we are plunged into a living stream in which the faith can rediscover new vigor, in which the Church can be strengthened so as to proclaim the mystery of Christ ever more boldly. Jesus, born of Mary, is the Son of God, the sole Savior of all people, living and acting in his Church and in the world. ...

When we follow the Jubilee Way in the footsteps of Bernadette, we are reminded of the heart of the message of Lourdes. Bernadette is the eldest daughter of a very poor family, with neither knowledge nor power, and in poor health. Mary chose her to transmit her message of conversion, prayer and penance, which fully accord with words of Jesus: "What you have hidden from the wise and understanding, you have revealed to babes" (*Mt* 11:25). On their spiritual journey, Christians too are called to render fruitful the grace of their Baptism, to nourish themselves with the Eucharist, to draw strength from prayer so as to bear witness and to express solidarity with all their fellow human beings (cf. *Homage to the Virgin Mary*, Piazza di Spagna, December 8, 2007). It is therefore a genuine catechesis that is being proposed to us in this way, under Mary's gaze. Let us allow her to instruct us too, and to guide us along the path that leads to the Kingdom of her Son!

In the course of her catechesis, the "beautiful lady" reveals her name to Bernadette: "I am the Immaculate Conception". Mary thereby discloses the extraordinary grace that she has received from God, that of having been conceived without sin, for "he has looked on his servant in her lowliness" (cf. *Lk 1:48*). Mary is the woman from this earth who gave herself totally to God, and who received the privilege of giving human life to his eternal Son. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; let what you have said be done to me" (*Lk 1:38*). She is beauty transfigured, the image of the new humanity. By presenting herself in this way, in utter dependence upon God, Mary expresses in reality an attitude of total freedom, based upon the full recognition of her true dignity. This privilege concerns us too, for it discloses to us our own dignity as men and women, admittedly marked by sin, but saved in hope, a hope which allows us to face our daily life. This is the path which Mary opens up for man. To give oneself fully to God is to find the path of true freedom. For by turning towards God, man becomes himself. He rediscovers his original vocation as a person created in his image and likeness.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, the primary purpose of the shrine at Lourdes is to be a place of encounter with God in prayer and a place of service to our brothers and sisters, notably through the welcome given to the sick, the poor and all who suffer. In this place, Mary comes to us as a mother, always open to the needs of her children. Through the light which streams from her face, God's mercy is made manifest. Let us allow ourselves to be touched by her gaze, which tells us that we are all loved by God and never abandoned by him! Mary comes to remind us that prayer which is humble and intense, trusting and persevering, must have a central place in our Christian lives. Prayer is indispensable if we are to receive Christ's power. "People who pray are not wasting their time, even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 36). To allow oneself to become absorbed by activity runs the risk of depriving prayer of its specifically Christian character and its true efficacy. The prayer of the Rosary, so dear to Bernadette and to Lourdes pilgrims, concentrates within itself the depths of the Gospel message. It introduces us to contemplation of the face of Christ. From this prayer of the humble, we can draw an abundance of graces.

The presence of young people at Lourdes is also an important element. Dear friends, gathered this morning around the World Youth Day Cross: when Mary received the angel's visit, she was a young girl from Nazareth leading the simple and courageous life typical of the women of her village. And if God's gaze focused particularly upon her, trusting in her, Mary wants to tell you once more that not one of you is indifferent in God's eyes. He directs his loving gaze upon each one of you and he calls you to a life that is happy and full of meaning. Do not allow yourselves to be discouraged by difficulties! Mary was disturbed by the message of the angel who came to tell her that she would become the Mother of the Savior. She was conscious of her frailty in the face of God's omnipotence. "Nevertheless," she said "yes", without hesitating. And thanks to her yes, salvation came into the world, thereby changing the history of mankind. For your part, dear young people, do not be afraid to say yes to the Lord's summons when he invites you to walk in his footsteps. Respond generously to the Lord! Only he can fulfill the deepest aspirations of your heart. You have come to Lourdes in great numbers for attentive and generous service to the sick and to the other pilgrims, setting out in this way to follow Christ the servant. Serving our brothers and sisters opens our hearts and makes us available. In the silence of prayer, be prepared to confide in Mary, who spoke to Bernadette in a spirit of respect and trust towards her. May Mary help those who are called to marriage to discover the beauty of a genuine and profound love, lived as a reciprocal and faithful gift! To those among you whom he calls to follow him in the priesthood or the religious life, I would like to reiterate all the joy that is to be had through giving one's life totally for the service of God and others. May Christian families and communities be places where solid vocations can come to birth and grow, for the service of the Church and the world!

Mary's message is a message of hope for all men and women of our day, whatever their country of origin. I like to invoke Mary as the *star of hope* (*Spe Salvi*, 50). On the paths of our lives, so often shrouded in darkness, she is a beacon of hope who enlightens us and gives direction to our journey. Through her "yes", through the generous gift of herself, she has opened up to God the gates of our world and our history. And she invites us to live like her in invincible hope, refusing to believe those who claim that we are trapped in the fatal power of destiny. She accompanies us with her maternal presence amid the events of our personal lives, our family lives, and our national lives. Happy are those men and women who place their trust in him who, at the very moment when he was offering his life for our salvation, gave us his Mother to be our own!

Dear Brothers and Sisters, in this land of France, the Mother of the Lord is venerated in countless shrines which thereby manifest the faith handed down from generation to generation. Celebrated in her Assumption, she is your country's beloved patroness. May she always be honored fervently in each of your families, in your religious communities and in your parishes! May Mary watch over all the

inhabitants of your beautiful country and over the pilgrims who have come in such numbers from other countries to celebrate this Jubilee! May she be for all people the Mother who surrounds her children in their joys and their trials! Holy Mary, Mother of God, our Mother, teach us to believe, to hope and to love with you. Show us the way towards the kingdom of your Son Jesus! Star of the sea, shine upon us and lead us on our way! (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 50). Amen.

Pontiff's Address to French Bishops – September 14, 2008

... I warmly greet each one of you, my brothers in the episcopate, who have come here from every part of France and from overseas. (I include here Archbishop François Gamier of Cambrai, who is today celebrating in Valenciennes the Millennium of Our Lady of Saint-Cordon).

I am happy to be among you this evening here in the hemicycle of Saint Bernadette's Church, where you habitually come together for prayer and for your meetings, where you express your concerns and your hopes, where you hold your discussions and your reflections. This hall is in a privileged location close to the grotto and the Marian Basilicas.

...

With heartfelt joy, I entrust you, dear Brothers in the episcopate, to Our Lady of Lourdes and to Saint Bernadette.

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Papal Address at End of Torchlight Procession – September 14, 2008

... One hundred and fifty years ago, on February 11, 1858, in this place known as the Grotto of Massabielle, away from the town, a simple young girl from Lourdes, Bernadette Soubirous, saw a light, and in this light she saw a young lady who was "beautiful, more beautiful than any other." This woman addressed her with kindness and gentleness, with respect and trust: "She said *vous* to me", Bernadette recounted, "Would you do me the kindness of coming here for a fortnight?" she asked her. "She was looking at me as one person who speaks to another." It was in this conversation, in this dialogue marked by such delicacy, that the Lady instructed her to deliver certain very simple messages on prayer, penance and conversion. It is hardly surprising that Mary should be beautiful, given that during the apparition of March 25, 1858-she reveals her name in this way: "I am the Immaculate Conception."

Let us now look at this "woman clothed with the sun" (*Rev 12:1*) as she is described for us in Scripture. The Most Holy Virgin Mary, the glorious woman of the Apocalypse, wears on her head a crown of twelve stars which represent the twelve tribes of Israel, the entire people of God, the whole communion of saints, while at her feet is the moon, image of death and mortality.

Mary left death behind her; she is entirely re-clothed with life, the life of her Son, the risen Christ. She is thus the sign of the victory of love, of good and of God, giving our world the hope that it needs. This evening, let us turn our gaze towards Mary, so glorious and so human, allowing her to lead us towards God who is the victor.

Countless people have borne witness to this: when they encountered Bernadette's radiant face, it left a deep impression on their hearts and minds. Whether it was during the apparitions themselves or while she was recounting them, her face was simply shining. Bernadette from that time on had the light of Massabielle dwelling within her. The daily life of the Soubirous family was nevertheless a tale of deprivation and sadness, sickness and incomprehension, rejection and poverty. Even if there was no lack of love and warmth in family relationships, life at the *cachot* was hard. Nevertheless, the shadows of the earth did not prevent the light of heaven from shining. "The light shines in the darkness" (*Jn 1:5*).

Lourdes is one of the places chosen by God for his beauty to be reflected with particular brightness, hence the importance here of the symbol of light. From the fourth apparition onwards, on arriving at the grotto, Bernadette would light a votive candle each morning and hold it in her left hand for as long as the Virgin was visible to her. Soon, people would give Bernadette a candle to plant in the ground inside the grotto. Very soon, too, people would place their own candles in this place of light and peace. The Mother of God herself let it be known that she liked the touching homage of these thousands of torches, which since that time have continued to shine upon the rock of the apparition and give her glory. From that day, before the grotto, night and day, summer and winter, a burning bush shines out, aflame with the prayers of pilgrims and the sick, who bring their concerns and their needs, but above all their faith and their hope.

By coming here to Lourdes on pilgrimage, we wish to enter, following in Bernadette's footsteps, into this extraordinary closeness between heaven and earth, which never fails and never ceases to grow. In the course of the apparitions, it is notable that Bernadette prays the rosary under the gaze of Mary, who unites herself to her at the moment of the doxology. This fact confirms the profoundly theocentric character of the prayer of the rosary. When we pray it, Mary offers us her heart and her gaze in order to contemplate the life of her Son, Jesus Christ.

My venerable Predecessor, Pope John Paul II, came here to Lourdes on two occasions. In his life and ministry, we know how much his prayer relied upon the Virgin Mary's intercession. Like many of his predecessors in the Chair of Peter, he also keenly encouraged the prayer of the rosary; one of the particular ways in which he did so was by enriching the Holy Rosary with the meditation of the Mysteries of Light. These are now represented on the façade of the Basilica in the new mosaics inaugurated last year. As with all the events in the life of Christ, "which she preserved and pondered in her heart" (Lk 2:19), Mary helps us to understand all the stages in his public ministry as integral to the revelation of God's glory. May Lourdes, the land of light, continue to be a school for learning to pray the Rosary, which introduces the disciples of Jesus, under the gaze of his Mother, into an authentic and cordial dialogue with his Master!

On Bernadette's lips we hear the Virgin Mary asking us to *come here in procession* so as to pray with simplicity and fervour. The torchlight procession expresses the mystery of prayer in a form that our eyes of flesh can grasp: in the communion of the Church, which unites the elect in heaven with pilgrims on earth, the light of dialogue between man and his Lord blazes forth and a luminous path opens up in human history, even in its darkest moments. This procession is a time of great ecclesial joy, but also a time of seriousness: the intentions we bring emphasize our profound communion with all those who suffer. ...

Mary teaches us to pray, to make of our prayer an act of love for God and an act of fraternal charity. By praying with Mary, our heart welcomes those who suffer. How can our life not be transformed by this? Why should our whole life and being not become places of hospitality for our neighbors? Lourdes is a place of light because it is a place of communion, hope and conversion.

... In this shrine at Lourdes, to which the Christians of the whole world have turned their gaze since the Virgin Mary caused hope and love to shine here by giving pride of place to the sick, the poor and the little ones, we are invited to discover the simplicity of our vocation: it is enough to love.

... The apparitions were bathed in light and God chose to ignite in Bernadette's gaze a flame which converted countless hearts. How many come here to see it with the hope-secretly perhaps-of receiving some miracle; then, on the return journey, having had a spiritual experience of life in the Church, they change their outlook upon God, upon others and upon themselves. A small flame called hope, compassion, tenderness now dwells within them. A quiet encounter with Bernadette and the Virgin Mary can change a person's life, for they are here, in Massabielle, to lead us to Christ who is our life, our strength and our light. May the Virgin Mary and Saint Bernadette help you to live as children of light in order to testify, every day of your lives, that Christ is our light, our hope and our life! Amen.

On the Nearness of Our Lady – Angelus Address in Lourdes on September 14, 2008

... Every day, praying the Angelus gives us the opportunity to meditate for a few moments, in the midst of all our activities, on the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God. At noon, when the first hours of the day are already beginning to weigh us down with fatigue, our availability and our generosity are renewed by the contemplation of Mary's "yes." This clear and unreserved "yes" is rooted in the mystery of Mary's freedom, a total and entire freedom before God, completely separated from any complicity with sin, thanks to the privilege of her Immaculate Conception.

This privilege given to Mary, which sets her apart from our common condition, does not distance her from us, but on the contrary, it brings her closer. While sin divides, separating us from one another, Mary's purity makes her infinitely close to our hearts, attentive to each of us and desirous of our true good. You see it here in Lourdes, as in all Marian shrines; immense crowds come thronging to Mary's feet to entrust to her their most intimate thoughts, their most heartfelt wishes. That which many, either because of embarrassment or modesty, do not confide to their nearest and dearest, they confide to her who is all pure, to her Immaculate Heart: with simplicity, without frills, in truth. Before Mary, by virtue of her very purity, man does not hesitate to reveal his weakness, to express his questions and his doubts, to formulate his most secret hopes and desires. The Virgin Mary's maternal love disarms all pride; it

renders man capable of seeing himself as he is, and it inspires in him the desire to be converted so as to give glory to God.

Thus, Mary shows us the right way to come to the Lord. She teaches us to approach him in truth and simplicity. Thanks to her, we discover that the Christian faith is not a burden: it is like a wing which enables us to fly higher, so as to take refuge in God's embrace.

The life and faith of believers make it clear that the grace of the Immaculate Conception given to Mary is not merely a personal grace, but a grace for all, a grace given to the entire people of God. In Mary, the Church can already contemplate what she is called to become. Every believer can contemplate, here and now, the perfect fulfilment of his or her own vocation. May each of you always remain full of thanksgiving for what the Lord has chosen to reveal of his plan of salvation through the mystery of Mary: a mystery in which we are involved most intimately since, from the height of the Cross which we celebrate and exalt today, it is revealed to us through the words of Jesus himself that his Mother is our Mother. Inasmuch as we are sons and daughters of Mary, we can profit from all the graces given to her; the incomparable dignity that came to her through her Immaculate Conception shines brightly over us, her children.

Here, close to the grotto, and in intimate communion with all the pilgrims present in Marian shrines and with all the sick in body and soul who are seeking relief, we bless the Lord for Mary's presence among her people, and to her we address our prayer in faith:

"Holy Mary, you showed yourself here 150 years ago to the young Bernadette, you 'are the true fount of hope' (Dante, *Paradiso*, XXXIII:12).

[After praying the Angelus, the Holy Father greeted the people in several languages. In English, he said:] Faithful pilgrims who have gathered here from every part of the world, we come once more to draw faith and comfort, joy and love, security and peace, from the source of your Immaculate Heart. *Monstra Te esse Matrem*. Show yourself a Mother for us all, O Mary! And give us Christ, the hope of the world! Amen."

"Mary Dwells in the Joy and the Glory of the Resurrection" - Papal Homily at Mass With Sick in Lourdes on September 15, 2008

... Today, as we celebrate the memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows, we contemplate Mary sharing her Son's compassion for sinners. As Saint Bernard declares, the Mother of Christ entered into the Passion of her Son through her compassion (cf. Homily for Sunday in the Octave of the Assumption). At the foot of the Cross, the prophecy of Simeon is fulfilled: her mother's heart is pierced through (cf. Lk 2:35) by the torture inflicted on the innocent one born of her flesh. Just as Jesus cried (cf. Jn 11:35), so too Mary certainly cried over the tortured body of her Son. Her self-restraint, however, prevents us from plumbing the depths of her grief; the full extent of her suffering is merely suggested by the traditional symbol of the seven swords. As in the case of her Son Jesus, one might say that she too was led to perfection through this suffering (cf. Heb 2:10), so as to make her capable of receiving the new spiritual mission that her Son entrusts to her immediately before "giving up his spirit" (cf. Jn 19:30): that of becoming the mother of Christ in his members. In that hour, through the figure of the beloved disciple, Jesus presents each of his disciples to his Mother when he says to her: Behold your Son (cf. Jn 19:26-27).

Today Mary dwells in the joy and the glory of the Resurrection. The tears shed at the foot of the Cross have been transformed into a smile which nothing can wipe away, even as her maternal compassion towards us remains unchanged. The intervention of the Virgin Mary in offering succor throughout history testifies to this, and does not cease to call forth, in the people of God, an unshakable confidence in her: the Memorare prayer expresses this sentiment very well. Mary loves each of her children, giving particular attention to those who, like her Son at the hour of his Passion, are prey to suffering; she loves them quite simply because they are her children, according to the will of Christ on the Cross. The psalmist, seeing from afar this maternal bond which unites the Mother of Christ with the people of faith, prophesies regarding the Virgin Mary that "the richest of the people ... will seek your smile" (Ps 44:13). In this way, at the instigation of the inspired word of Scripture, Christians have always sought the smile of Our Lady, this smile which medieval artists were able to represent with such marvelous skill and to show to advantage. This smile of Mary is for all; but it is directed quite particularly to those who suffer, so that they can find comfort and solace therein. To seek Mary's smile is not an act of devotional or outmoded sentimentality, but rather the proper expression of the living and profoundly human relationship which binds us to her whom Christ gave us as our Mother.

To wish to contemplate this smile of the Virgin, does not mean letting oneself be led by an uncontrolled imagination. Scripture itself discloses it to us through the lips of Mary when she sings the Magnificat: "My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit exults in God my Savior" (Lk 1:46-47). When the Virgin Mary gives thanks to the Lord, she calls us to witness. Mary shares, as if by anticipation, with us, her future children, the joy that dwells in her heart, so that it can become ours. Every time we recite the Magnificat, we become witnesses of her smile. Here in Lourdes, in the course of the apparition of Wednesday March 3, 1858, Bernadette contemplated this smile of Mary in a most particular way. It was the first response that the Beautiful Lady gave to the young visionary who wanted to know who she was. Before introducing herself, some days later, as "the Immaculate Conception," Mary first taught Bernadette to know her smile, this being the most appropriate point of entry into the revelation of her mystery. In the smile of the most eminent of all creatures, looking down on us, is reflected our dignity as children of God, that dignity which never abandons the sick person. This smile, a true reflection of God's tenderness, is the source of an invincible hope.

Unfortunately we know only too well: the endurance of suffering can upset life's most stable equilibrium, it can shake the firmest foundations of confidence, and sometimes even leads people to despair of the meaning and value of life. There are struggles that we cannot sustain alone, without the help of divine grace. When speech can no longer find the right words, the need arises for a loving presence: we seek then the closeness not only of those who share the same blood or are linked to us by friendship, but also the closeness of those who are intimately bound to us by faith. Who could be more intimate to us than Christ and his holy Mother, the Immaculate One? More than any others, they are capable of understanding us and grasping how hard we have to fight against evil and suffering. The Letter to the Hebrews says of Christ that he "is not unable to sympathize with our weaknesses; for in every respect he has been tempted as we are" (cf. Heb 4:15). I would like to say, humbly, to those who suffer and to those who struggle and are tempted to turn their backs on life: turn towards Mary! Within the smile of the Virgin lies mysteriously hidden the strength to fight against sickness, in support of life. With her, equally, is found the grace to accept without fear or bitterness to leave this world at the hour chosen by God.

How true was the insight of that great French spiritual writer, Dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard, who in "*L'âme de tout apostolat*," proposed to the devout Christian to gaze frequently "into the eyes of the Virgin Mary"! Yes, to seek the smile of the Virgin Mary is not a pious infantilism, it is the aspiration, as Psalm 44 says, of those who are "the richest of the people" (verse 13). "The richest," that is to say, in the order of faith, those who have attained the highest degree of spiritual maturity and know precisely how to acknowledge their weakness and their poverty before God. In the very simple manifestation of tenderness that we call a smile, we grasp that our sole wealth is the love God bears us, which passes through the heart of her who became our Mother. To seek this smile, is first of all to have grasped the gratuitousness of love; it is also to be able to elicit this smile through our efforts to live according to the word of her Beloved Son, just as a child seeks to elicit its mother's smile by doing what pleases her. And we know what pleases Mary, thanks to the words she spoke to the servants at Cana: "Do whatever he tells you" (cf. Jn 2:5).

Mary's smile is a spring of living water. "He who believes in me," says Jesus, "out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water" (Jn 7:38). Mary is the one who believed and, from her womb, rivers of living water have flowed forth to irrigate human history. The spring that Mary pointed out to Bernadette here in Lourdes is the humble sign of this spiritual reality. From her believing heart, from her maternal heart, flows living water which purifies and heals. By immersing themselves in the baths at Lourdes, how many people have discovered and experienced the gentle maternal love of the Virgin Mary, becoming attached to her in order to bind themselves more closely to the Lord! In the liturgical sequence of this feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, Mary is honored under the title of *Fons amoris*, "fount of love." From Mary's heart, there springs up a gratuitous love which calls forth a response of filial love, called to ever greater refinement. Like every mother, and better than every mother, Mary is the teacher of love. That is why so many sick people come here to Lourdes, to quench their thirst at the "spring of love" and to let themselves be led to the sole source of salvation, her son Jesus the Savior.

... Without the Lord's help, the yoke of sickness and suffering weighs down on us cruelly. By receiving the sacrament of the sick, we seek to carry no other yoke than that of Christ, strengthened through his promise to us that his yoke will be easy to carry and his burden light (cf. Mt 11:30). I invite those who are to receive the sacrament of the sick during this Mass to enter into a hope of this kind. The Second Vatican Council presented Mary as the figure in whom the entire mystery of the Church is typified (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 63-65). Her personal journey outlines the profile of the Church, which is called to be just as attentive to those who suffer as she herself was. ... Thank you for your service with the suffering

Lord.

The service of charity that you offer is a Marian service. Mary entrusts her smile to you, so that you yourselves may become, in faithfulness to her son, springs of living water. Whatever you do, you do in the name of the Church, of which Mary is the purest image. May you carry her smile to everyone!

To conclude, I wish to join in the prayer of the pilgrims and the sick, and to pray with you a passage from the prayer to Mary that has been proposed for this Jubilee celebration: "Because you are the smile of God, the reflection of the light of Christ, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, Because you chose Bernadette in her lowliness, because you are the morning star, the gate of heaven and the first creature to experience the resurrection, Our Lady of Lourdes," with our brothers and sisters whose hearts and bodies are in pain, we pray to you!

Pope's Reflection at Lourdes on Eucharist - Conclusion of the Eucharistic procession at the Marian shrine in Lourdes on September 15, 2008.

... Mary, the holy Virgin, Mary, the Immaculate Conception, accepted, two thousand years ago, to give everything, to offer her body so as to receive the Body of the Creator. Everything came from Christ, even Mary; everything came through Mary, even Christ. Mary, the holy Virgin, is with us this evening, in the presence of the Body of her Son, one hundred and fifty years after revealing herself to little Bernadette. Holy Virgin, help us to contemplate, help us to adore, help us to love, to grow in love for him who loved us so much, so as to live eternally with him. An immense crowd of witnesses is invisibly present beside us, very close to this blessed grotto and in front of this church that the Virgin Mary wanted to be built; the crowd of all those men and women who have contemplated, venerated, adored the real presence of him who gave himself to us even to the last drop of blood; the crowd of all those men and women who have spent hours in adoration of the Most Holy Sacrament of the altar. ... When, on the day after her first communion, a friend of Bernadette asked her: "What made you happier: your first communion or the apparitions?" Bernadette replied, "they are two things that go together, but cannot be compared. I was happy in both" ("Emmanuélite Estrade," June 4, 1958). She made this testimony to the Bishop of Tarbes in regard to her first communion: "Bernadette behaved with immense concentration, with an attention that left nothing to be desired ... she appeared profoundly aware of the holy action that was taking place. Everything developed in her in an astonishing way." ...

Benedict XVI's Farewell to France – September 15, 2008 at the Tarbes-Lourdes Pyrénées Airport

... The second panel of the diptych was an emblematic place which attracts and fascinates every believer. Lourdes is like a light in the darkness of our groping to reach God. Mary opened there a gate towards a hereafter which challenges and charms us. *Maria, porta caeli!* I have set myself to learn from her during these three days. The Pope was duty bound to come to Lourdes to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the apparitions. Before the Grotto of Massabielle, I prayed for all of you. I prayed for the Church. I prayed for France and for the world. The two Eucharistic celebrations in Lourdes gave me an opportunity to join the faithful pilgrims. Having become one of their number, I completed all four stages of the Jubilee Way, visiting the parish church, the cachot and the Grotto, and finally the Chapel of Hospitality. I also prayed with and for the sick who come here to seek physical relief and spiritual hope. God does not forget them, and neither does the Church. Like every faithful pilgrim, I wanted to take part in the torchlight procession and the Blessed Sacrament Procession. They carry aloft to God our prayers and our praise. Lourdes is also the place where the Bishops of France meet regularly in order to pray and celebrate Mass together, to reflect and to exchange views on their mission as pastors. I wanted to share with them my conviction that the times are favorable for a return to God.

... From Rome I shall remain close to you, and when I pray before the replica of the Lourdes Grotto which has been in the Vatican Gardens for a little over a century, I shall think of you.

May God bless you! Thank you.

On the Message of Lourdes: "There Is No True Love Without Suffering" – General Audience evaluating his September 12-15 Apostolic Trip to Paris and Lourdes

Today's meeting gives me the opportunity to review again the moments of the pastoral visit that I made in recent days to France; a visit that culminated with the pilgrimage to Lourdes on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Virgin's apparitions to St. Bernadette. ...

Architecture is also an artistic expression of the search for God, and undoubtedly the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris is an example of universal value. Inside this magnificent church, where I had the joy to preside over the celebration of vespers of the Blessed Virgin Mary, I exhorted the priests, deacons, men and women religious and seminarians who had come from all parts of France, to give priority to the religious listening of the divine word, looking at the Virgin Mary as sublime model.

... Then I went to Lourdes, where I was able to join thousands of faithful on the Jubilee Way, which includes the places of St. Bernadette's life: the parish church with the baptismal font where she was baptized; the "cachot" where she lived in great poverty as a girl; the Massabielle Grotto, where the Virgin appeared to her eighteen times. In the afternoon I took part in the traditional torchlight procession, which is a wonderful manifestation of faith in God and of devotion to his and our Mother. Lourdes is truly a place of light, prayer, hope and conversion, founded on the rock of the love of God, which had its culminating revelation in the glorious cross of Christ.

By a happy coincidence, last Sunday the liturgy celebrated the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, sign of hope par excellence, because it is the highest testimony of love. In Lourdes, in the school of Mary, first and perfect disciple of Christ, pilgrims learn to regard the crosses of their lives in the light of the glorious cross of Christ. Appearing to Bernadette, in the Grotto of Massabielle, Mary's first gesture was, in fact, the Sign of the Cross, in silence and without words. And Bernadette imitated her in turn making the Sign of the Cross though her hand was trembling.

And so the Virgin gave a first initiation on the essence of Christianity: The Sign of the Cross is the height of our faith, and doing it with an attentive heart we enter into the full mystery of our salvation. The whole message of Lourdes is contained in this gesture of the Virgin! God has so loved us that he gave himself up for us: This is the message of the Cross, "mystery of death and of glory."

The cross reminds us that there is no true love without suffering, there is no gift of life without pain. Many learn this truth in Lourdes, which is a school of faith and hope, because it is also a school of charity and of service to brothers. It is in this context of faith and prayer where the important meeting with the French episcopate took place: It was a moment of intense spiritual communion, in which together we entrusted to the Virgin our common hopes and pastoral concerns.

The next stage was the Eucharistic procession with thousands of faithful, among whom, as usual, were many sick people. Before the most Blessed Sacrament, our spiritual communion with Mary was made even more intense and profound because God gives us eyes and hearts capable of contemplating his Divine Son in the Holy Eucharist. Very moving was the silence of these thousands of people before the Lord, not an empty silence, but one full of prayer and awareness of the Lord's presence, who loved us to the point of being lifted up on the cross for us.

Monday, Sept. 15, liturgical memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows, was dedicated especially to the sick. After a brief visit to the hospital oratory, where Bernadette received her first Communion, I presided over the celebration of Holy Mass in the portico of the Basilica of the rosary, during which I administered the sacrament of anointing of the sick. With the sick and with those taking care of them, I meditated on the tears Mary shed under the cross, and on her smile that illuminates Easter morning.

Dear brothers and sisters, together we thank the Lord for this apostolic journey enriched by so many spiritual gifts. We praise him especially because Mary, by appearing to St. Bernadette, has opened to the world a privileged place to find divine love that heals and saves. In Lourdes, the Holy Virgin invites all to regard earth as a place of pilgrimage toward our final homeland, which is heaven. In reality, we are all pilgrims, we need Mary to guide us; and in Lourdes, her smile invites us to go forward with great confidence in the awareness that God is good, God is love.

Papal Homily at Albano Cathedral – September 21, 2008

... I especially invoke the maternal intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On this day -- which crowns your efforts, sacrifices and work to provide this cathedral with a renovated liturgical space, with opportune interventions, the ambo and the altar -- may the Madonna obtain for you in our time the possibility of writing another page in daily and popular sanctity, which will be joined to the other pages that have marked the life of the Church of Albano over the course of the centuries.

On the Last Who Are First – Angelus Address on September 21, 2008

... The Virgin Mary, who a week ago I had the joy of venerating at Lourdes, is the perfect vine in the Lord's vineyard. From her there grew the blessed fruit of divine love: Jesus, Our Savior. May she help us to respond always and with joy to the Lord's call, and to find our happiness in the possibility of toiling for the Kingdom of Heaven.

Marriage Crises Have a Flip Side - Audience to participants of an international Retrouvaille convention held at Castel Gandolfo on September 26, 2008

... when a couple in difficulty or ... even already separated, entrusts themselves to Mary and turns to him who has made the two of them "one flesh," you can be sure that the crisis will become, with the Lord's help, a moment of growth, and that love will be purified, matured and reinforced.

Angelus Address commemorating John Paul I on the thirtieth anniversary of his death – September 28, 2008

... He was thus an incomparable catechist, in the line of Pius X, his fellow countryman and predecessor in the See of St. Mark and then in the see of St. Peter. "We must feel small before God," he said in the same audience and added, "I am not ashamed to feel like a child before his mother; one believes in one's mother; I believe in the Lord, in what he has revealed to me."

These words display the whole breadth of his faith. As we thank God for having given him to the Church and to the world, let us treasure his example, exerting ourselves to cultivate his humility, which made him capable of talking to everyone, especially the little and so-called distant. For these intentions let us call upon Mary Most Holy, humble handmaiden of the Lord.

... I wish everyone a good month of October, month of the Holy Rosary, during which, if it pleases God, I will go on pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady at Pompei on Sunday, Oct. 19.