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Pope Benedict XVI

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December 2008



Pope's Address to Italian Seminarians – December 2, 2008

Dear friends, while thanking you for your visit, I invoke over each one of you the maternal protection of the Virgin Mother of Christ, which the Advent liturgy presents to us as model of those who watch while awaiting the glorious return of her divine Son. Entrust yourselves to her with confidence, take recourse often to her intercession, so that she will help you to stay awake and vigilant. For my part, I assure you of my affection and daily prayer, while I bless you all from my heart.

On Christ, the New Adam – General Audience, December 3, 2008

I invite you to rediscover, in the spiritual climate of Advent, intimacy with Christ, placing yourselves in the school of the Virgin Mary. ... Finally, I exhort you, dear newlyweds, to be builders of genuine Christian families, being inspired in the model of the Holy Family of Nazareth, whom you should look to particularly in this time of preparation for Christmas.

On the Definitive Exodus – Angelus Address December 7, 2008

Jesus is the first fruit of this new humanity, the Son of God and the Son of Mary. She, the Virgin Mother, is the "way" that God himself prepared for his coming into the world. With all her humility, Mary walks at the head of the new Israel in the exodus from every exile, from all oppression, from every moral and material slavery, toward "the new heavens and the new earth, in which justice lives" (2 Peter 3:13). Let us entrust the desire for peace and salvation of the men of our time to her maternal intercession.

On the Immaculate Conception: "The Reflection of the Beauty That Saves the World" – Angelus Address, December 8, 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The mystery of Mary's Immaculate Conception, which we celebrated solemnly today, reminds us of two fundamental truths of our faith: in the first place original sin, and then the victory of Christ's grace over it, a victory that shines sublimely in Mary Most Holy. The existence of what the Church calls "original sin" is, sadly, a crushing truth, suffice it to look around us and above all in our interior. The experience of evil is, in fact, so consistent, that it imposes itself and makes us ask the question: from whence does it come? For a believer especially, the question is even more profound: If God, who is absolute goodness, has created everything, where does evil come from?

The first pages of the Bible (Genesis 1-3) respond precisely to the fundamental question -- posed by every human generation -- with the account of creation and our parents' fall: God created everything so that it would exist, in particular he created man in his own image; he did not create death, rather, the latter entered the world because of the envy of the devil (cf. Wisdom 1:13-14; 2:23-24), who, rebelling against God, also attracted men with deceit, inducing them to rebellion. It is the drama of freedom, which God accepts totally out of love, but promising that there would be the son of a woman that would crush the head of the ancient serpent (Genesis 3:15).

Hence, from the beginning, the "eternal counsel" -- as Dante would say -- has a "fixed term" (*Paradise*, XXXIII, 3): The Woman predestined to be mother of the Redeemer, mother of him who humbled himself to the extreme to lead us back to our original dignity. In God's eyes, this Woman has always had a face and name: "full of grace" (Luke 1:28), as the Angel called her when visiting her in Nazareth. She is the new Eve, spouse of the new Adam, destined to be the mother of all the redeemed. Thus wrote St. Andrew of Crete: "The Theotokos Mary, the common refuge of all Christians, was the first to be delivered from the primitive fall of our parents" (Homily IV, on Christmas, PG 97, 880 A). And today's liturgy states that God has "prepared a worthy dwelling for his Son and, in anticipation of his death, preserved her from all stain of sin" (Collect Prayer).

Beloved, in Mary Immaculate we contemplate the reflection of the Beauty that saves the world: the beauty of God that shines on the face of Christ. In Mary, this beauty is totally pure, humble, free of all pride and presumption. The Virgin showed herself in this way to St. Bernadette 150 years ago in Lourdes, and in this way she is venerated in so many shrines. This afternoon, in keeping with tradition, I will also render her homage before the monument dedicated to her in the Piazza di Spagna. Let us now invoke the Immaculate Virgin with confidence, recalling with the Angelus the words of the Gospel, which today's liturgy proposes for our meditation.

[After the Angelus the Pope greeted the pilgrims in various languages. In English, he said:]

I greet all the English-speaking visitors and pilgrims who are present today. The feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is an occasion for us all to rejoice in the radiant purity of the Mother of our Redeemer. She was chosen from among all women to be our pattern of holiness, a sign of favor to the Church at its beginning and the promise of its perfection as the spotless bride of Christ. May God bless you, your families and all those you love.

Pontiff's Piazza di Spagna Address: Mary Immaculate: "Sign of Sure Hope and Consolation" – December 8, 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Almost three months ago, I had the joy to go on pilgrimage to Lourdes, on the occasion of the 150 years of the historic apparition of the Virgin Mary to St. Bernadette. The celebration of this singular anniversary concludes precisely today, solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, because the "beautiful lady" -- as Bernadette called her, when appearing to her for the last time in the grotto of Massabielle, revealed her name, saying: "I am the Immaculate Conception." She said it in the local language, and the little seer referred that expression, which to her was unknown and incomprehensible, to her parish priest.

"Immaculate Conception": Today we also repeat with emotion that mysterious name. We repeat it here, at the foot of this monument in the heart of Rome; and innumerable brothers and sisters of ours do the same in other places of the world, in shrines and chapels, as well as in the homes of Christian families. Wherever there is a Catholic community, the Virgin is venerated with this wonderful and marvelous name: Immaculate Conception. Of course, the conviction of Mary's immaculate conception already existed many centuries before the apparitions of Lourdes, but the latter came as a heavenly seal after my venerated predecessor, Blessed Pius IX, defined the dogma on Dec. 8, 1854. In today's feast, so loved by the Christian people, this expression arises from the heart and flowers on the lips as the name of our heavenly Mother. As a child raises its eyes to his mother's face and, seeing him smiling, forgets all fear and pain, so we, turning our gaze to Mary, recognize in her "God's smile," immaculate reflection of divine light, we find in her our hope, also in the midst of the problems and tragedies of the world.

It is a tradition for the Pope to join the city's acknowledgement by bringing a basket of flowers to Mary. These flowers indicate our love and devotion: the love and devotion of the Pope, of the Church of Rome and of the inhabitants of this City, who feel themselves spiritually children of the Virgin Mary. Symbolically, the roses can express all the beautiful and good we have carried out during the year, because in this now traditional meeting we would like to offer it to our Mother, convinced that we could have done nothing without her protection and without the grace that she obtains continually from God. However -- as is usually said -- there are no roses without thorns, and also on the stems of these wonderful white roses there is no lack of thorns, which represent for us the difficulties, sufferings, and evils that mark the lives of persons and of our communities. We present our joys to our Mother, but also entrust to her our preoccupations, confident of finding in her the comfort not to be discouraged, and the support to go forward.

O Immaculate Virgin, in this moment I would like to entrust to you especially the "little ones" of this, our city: the children above all, especially those who are seriously ill, children who are deprived and those who suffer the consequences of harsh family situations. Watch over them and make them feel, in the affection and help of those around them, the warmth of the love of God. I entrust to you, O Mary, the lonely elderly, the sick, immigrants who find difficulty in integrating, family nuclei that struggle to cover their bills and persons who do not find work or who have lost an indispensable job to get ahead. Teach us, Mary, to be sympathetic with those who are going through difficulties, to level the ever larger social differences; help us to cultivate a lively sense of the common good, of respect for what is public, encourage us to regard -- more than ever this, our city of Rome -- as patrimony of all, and may each one of us do, with awareness and determination, our part in constructing a more just and sympathetic society.

O Immaculate Mary, who are for all a sign of sure hope and consolation, let us be attracted by your immaculate candor. Your beauty -- "*Tota Pulchra*," we sing today -- assures us that the victory of love is possible; what is more, that it is certain. It assures us that grace is stronger than sin and, therefore, that rescue from any slavery is possible. Yes, O Mary, you help us to believe with greater confidence in the good and to put our faith in gratitude, service, nonviolence, the force of truth. You encourage us to stay awake, not to yield to the temptation of easy evasions, to confront reality and its problems with courage and responsibility. So you did, young woman, called to risk all for the Word of the Lord. Be a loving mother for our young people, so that they will have the courage to be "morning watchmen," and give this virtue to all Christians so that they will be the soul of the world in this not easy period of our history. Immaculate Virgin, Mother of God and our Mother, "*Salus Populi Romani*," pray for us!

The 'Nearness' of God Is a Question of Love – Angelus Address December 14, 2008

And now let us recite together the "*Angelus Domini*," calling upon the intercession of Mary, so that Jesus, who in his birth brings God's benediction to men, be welcomed with love in all the homes of Rome and the world.

On the Meaning and Value of Our Lives – General Audience on December 17, 2008

Let us ask most holy Mary, the tabernacle of the incarnate Word, and St. Joseph, silent witness of the events of salvation, to communicate to us the sentiments they had while they awaited the birth of

Jesus, so that we can prepare ourselves to celebrate in a holy way the coming Christmas, in the joy of faith and enlivened by the determination of a sincere conversion

In English, the pope said,

Dear Brothers and Sisters, today we commence the Christmas Novena of Advent by contemplating the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies in the coming of the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary in the stable of Bethlehem.

On the Angelus: When God Knocked at Mary's Heart – Angelus Address on December 21, 2008

This Sunday's Gospel presents to us once again the account of the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38), the mystery to which we return every day in reciting the Angelus. This prayer allows us to relive the decisive moment when God knocked at Mary's heart and, having received her "yes," began to take flesh in her and from her. The collect prayer of today's Mass is the same prayer that is recited at the end of the Angelus: "Lord, fill our hearts with your love, and as you revealed to us by an angel the coming of your Son as man, so lead through his suffering and death to the glory of his resurrection." With the feast of Christmas just a few days away, we are invited to fix our gaze upon the ineffable mystery that Mary carried for nine months in her virginal womb: the mystery of God who becomes man. This is the first hinge of Redemption. The second is Jesus' death and resurrection, and these two inseparable hinges manifest a single divine plan: to save humanity and its history, assuming it to the very end by completely taking on all the evil that oppresses it.

Beyond the historical dimension of this mystery of salvation, there is a cosmic dimension: Christ is the sun of grace who, with his light, "transfigures and inflames the universe with expectation" (Liturgy). The time of the Christmas feast is linked with the winter solstice, when the days of the northern hemisphere begin to get longer again. In this connection, perhaps not many people know that St. Peter's Square is a meridian: the great obelisk, in fact, casts its shadow upon a line that runs along the pavement toward the fountain below this window, and in these days the shadow is the longest of the year. This reminds us of the function of astronomy in marking the times of prayer. The Angelus, for example, is recited in the morning, at noon and in the evening. The meridian, which in the past served for helping one to know "true noon," was the standard for clocks.

Let us return now to contemplating of Mary and Jesus, who await the birth of Jesus, and learn from them the secret of recollection for tasting the joy of Christmas. Let us prepare to welcome with faith the Redeemer who comes to be with us, the Word of God's love for humanity of every age.

In English he said,

I am pleased to greet all the English-speaking pilgrims gathered for this Angelus. In today's liturgy, we recall how the Virgin Mary was invited by the Angel to conceive the one in whom the fullness of divinity would dwell: Jesus, the "Son of the Most High." As we prepare to celebrate his birth, let us not be afraid to say "Yes" to the Lord, so that we may join Our Lady in singing his goodness forever. May God bless all of you!

Benedict XVI's Christmas Message Urbi et orbi – December 25, 2008

The grace of God our Saviour has appeared to all" (Tit 2:11, Vulg.) ... A newborn Child, the Son of the Virgin Mary.

... The grace of God has appeared to all. Jesus – the face of the "God who saves", did not show himself only for a certain few, but for everyone. Although it is true that in the simple and lowly dwelling of Bethlehem few persons encountered him, still he came for all: Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, those near and those far away, believers and non-believers... for everyone. Supernatural grace, by God's will, is meant for every creature. Yet each human person needs to accept that grace, to utter his or her own "yes", like Mary, so that his or her heart can be illumined by a ray of that divine light. It was Mary and Joseph, who that night welcomed the incarnate Word, awaiting it with love, along with the shepherds

who kept watch over their flocks (cf. Lk 2:1-20).

Brothers and sisters, all you who are listening to my words: this proclamation of hope – the heart of the Christmas message – is meant for all men and women. Jesus was born for everyone, and just as Mary, in Bethlehem, offered him to the shepherds, so on this day the Church presents him to all humanity, so that each person and every human situation may come to know the power of God's saving grace, which alone can transform evil into good, which alone can change human hearts, making them oases of peace.

On the Feast of the Holy Family – Angelus Address on December 28, 2008

On this Sunday that follows the birth of the Lord, we celebrate with joy the Holy Family of Nazareth. The context is more than adequate, since Christmas is the feast of the family, par excellence. So many traditions and social customs demonstrate this, especially that of gathering together, in family, for the festive meals and the congratulations and the interchange of gifts. And, how can we not see that in these circumstances, the discontent and the sorrow caused by family strife is amplified?

Jesus wanted to be born and grow up in a human family; he wanted the Virgin Mary to be his mom and Joseph to fulfill the role of father. They raised and educated him with immense love. Jesus' family truly merits the title of "holy," since it is entirely focused on the desire of fulfilling the will of God, incarnated in the adorable presence of Jesus. In one sense it is a family like all others, and as such, it is a model of conjugal love, collaboration, sacrifice, confidence in divine providence, a spirit of work and solidarity. Certainly, it presents all these values that the family protects and promotes, contributing in a basic sense to form the fabric of every society.

At the same time, though, the family of Nazareth is unique, different from all others, because of its singular vocation, linked to the mission of the Son of God. Precisely because of its unique character, it presents to every family, and in the first place to Christian families, the horizon of God, the sweet and demanding priority of his will, the perspective of heaven, to which we are destined.

For all of this, today let us give thanks to God, like the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, who with such faith and willingness cooperated in the Lord's plan of salvation.

To express the beauty and the value of the family, today thousands of people have gathered in Madrid. To them, I want to address myself in Spanish:

These qualities are incarnated in an eminent way in the Holy Family, in which Jesus came to the world and grew and filled himself with wisdom, with the exquisite care of Mary and the faithful guardianship of St. Joseph.

In this prayer of the Angelus, I entrust all of you to our Mother in heaven, the most holy Virgin

Mary. [After praying the Angelus, the Pope continued:]

Let us entrust to Jesus, Prince of Peace, our fervent prayer for these intentions, and to him, to Mary and Joseph, let us implore: "Family of Nazareth, expert in suffering, give peace to the world." Give peace today above all to the Holy Land!

[The Holy Father then greeted the people in various languages. In English, he said,]

I welcome all the English-speaking pilgrims at this Angelus. Today we recall how Mary and Joseph, after presenting Jesus in the temple, took the child to Nazareth and began their life as a family. May all families strive to imitate their faith, hope and charity, so as to bear greater witness to the singular importance of the "domestic church" for the life of the universal Church and for society. God bless you all!