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Pope Benedict XVI

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December 2009



The Word of God Is the Subject That Moves History

- Angelus Address, December 6, 2009

... Jesus himself is the divine Word that became flesh in Mary's virginal womb: In him God is fully revealed, he has spoken and given us everything, opening the treasures of his truth and of his mercy to us. St. Ambrose continues in his commentary: "So, the Word descended that the earth, which before had been a desert, would produce its fruits for us" (ibid.) Dear friends, the most beautiful flower that has sprung up from the word of God is the Virgin Mary. She is the first fruits of the Church, garden of God on earth. But, while Mary is the Immaculate One -- as we will celebrate her the day after tomorrow -- the Church has constant need of purifying herself, because sin infects all her members. In the Church there is always a struggle taking place between the desert and the garden, between the sin that parches the earth and

the grace that waters it so that it produces abundant fruits of holiness. Let us therefore pray to the Mother of the Lord that she will help us, in this Advent season, to "straighten" our ways, letting ourselves be guided by the word of God.

On Mary as Mother: "We can turn to her and our Heart receives Light and Comfort." - *Angelus Address, December 8, 2009*

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

The eighth of December we celebrate one of the most beautiful feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary: the Solemnity of her Immaculate Conception. But what does it mean that Mary is the "Immaculate"? And what does this title tell to us?

First of all, we refer to the biblical texts of today's liturgy, especially the great "fresco" of the third chapter of the Book of Genesis and the account of the Annunciation of the Gospel of Luke. After original sin, God turned to the serpent, which represents Satan, he curses him and adds a promise: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Genesis 3:15)

It is the proclamation of revenge: Satan at the beginning of creation seems to have the upper hand, but the son of a woman will come who will crush his head. Thus, through the woman's offspring, God himself will triumph. That woman is the Virgin Mary, from whom was born Jesus Christ who, with his sacrifice, has defeated once and for all the ancient tempter. Because of this, in so many paintings and statues of the Immaculate, she is represented in the act of crushing a serpent under her foot.

The evangelist Luke, instead, shows us the Virgin Mary who receives the annunciation of the heavenly messenger (cf. Luke 1:26-38). She appears as the humble and authentic daughter of Israel, true Zion in whom God wishes to make his dwelling. She is the

young plant from which the Messiah must be born, the just and merciful King.

In the simplicity of the home of Nazareth lives Israel's pure remnant from which God wishes to have his people be born again, as a new tree that will extend its branches in the whole world, offering all men good fruits of salvation. As opposed to Adam and Eve, Mary remains obedient to the Lord's will, with her whole self she pronounces her "yes" and places herself fully at the disposition of the divine plan. She is the new Eve, true "mother of all the living" -- that is, of all those who by faith in Christ receive eternal life.

Dear friends, what immense joy to have Mary Immaculate as Mother! Every time we experience our frailty and the suggestion of evil, we can turn to her, and our heart receives light and comfort.

Also in life's trials, in the storms that make faith and hope vacillate, we think that we are her children and that the roots of our existence sink in the infinite grace of God. The Church herself, even if exposed to the negative influences of the world, always finds in her the star to direct and follow the route indicated by Christ.

Mary is in fact the Mother of the Church, as Pope Paul VI and Vatican Council II solemnly proclaimed. While, therefore, we render thanks to God for this wonderful sign of his goodness, we entrust to the Immaculate Virgin each one of us, our families and the community, the whole Church and the entire world. I will also do so this afternoon, according to the tradition, at the feet of the monument dedicated to her in *Piazza di Spagna*.

[After the Angelus, the Pope greeted the pilgrims. In Italian, he said:]

Also this year, in today's feast, I have the joy of greeting the Pontifical Academy of the Immaculate, led by Cardinal Andrea Maria Deskur. Dear Lord Cardinal, dear friends, I entrust with affection each one of you and your activity to the maternal

protection of the Virgin Mary.

[In English, he said:]

I am happy to greet all the English-speaking visitors present in this Angelus prayer. Today we celebrate the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. As we venerate her life of holiness, full of grace from the beginning of her existence, we praise God and acclaim the power of his gifts. May all Christians, filled with joyful hope and following the example of Mary, be faithful to God's grace and seek a life of holiness. I wish you all a happy feast day and a pleasant stay in Rome!

On Mary's Presence in Rome: "Let Us Hear Her Silent but Pressing Appeal." - Address during his visit to the image of the Immaculate Conception in Rome's *Piazza de Spagna*, December 8, 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

In the heart of Christian cities, Mary constitutes a sweet and reassuring presence. With her discreet style she gives everyone peace and hope in happy and sad moments of life. In the churches, in the chapels, on the walls of palaces: a painting, a mosaic, a statue recalls the presence of the Mother who constantly watches over her children. Also here, in *Piazza di Spagna*, Mary is placed on high, almost to watch over Rome.

What does Mary say to the city? Of what does she remind everyone with her presence? She reminds that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5:20) -- as the Apostle Paul writes. She is the Immaculate Mother who repeats also to the men of our time: Do not be afraid, Jesus has conquered evil; he has conquered it at the root, freeing us from its dominion.

How much we have need of this beautiful news!
Every day, in fact, through newspapers, the

television and the radio, evil is recounted, repeated, amplified, accustoming us to the most horrible things, making us become insensitive and, in some way, intoxicating us, because the negative is not fully disposed of and accumulates day after day. The heart hardens and thoughts become dark. Because of this, the city has need of Mary, who with her presence speaks to us of God, reminds us of the victory of grace over sin, and induces us to hope even in humanly more difficult situations.

... Mary Immaculate helps us to rediscover and defend the depth of persons, because in her there is perfect transparency of the soul in the body. She is purity personified, in the sense that the spirit, soul and body are in her, fully consistent between themselves and with the will of God. The Madonna teaches us to open ourselves to God's action, to look at others as he looks at them -- from the heart. And to look at them with mercy, with love, with infinite tenderness, especially those who are most alone, most looked down upon, most exploited. "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."

... Dear Roman friends, and all of you who live in this city! While we are busy in daily activities, let us listen to Mary's voice. Let us hear her silent but pressing appeal.

She says to each one of us: Where sin increased, grace can overflow, beginning precisely from your heart and your life! And the city will be more beautiful, more Christian, more human.

Thank you, Holy Mother, for this your message of hope. Thank you for your silent but eloquent presence in the heart of our city. Immaculate Virgin, "Salus Populi Romani," pray for us!

On Rupert of Deutz: "We Can Also, Each One in His Own Way, Find the Lord Jesus." - General Audience, December 9, 2009

... In the interpretation of the Bible, Rupert does not limit himself to repeat the teaching of the Fathers, but shows his originality. For example, he is the first

writer who identified the bride of the Canticum of Canticles with Mary Most Holy. Thus his commentary on this book of Scripture is a sort of Mariological summa, in which are presented the privileges and the excellent virtues of Mary. In one of the most inspired passages of his commentary, Rupert writes: "O most beloved among the beloved, Virgin of virgins, what in you is praised by your beloved Son, whom the entire choir of angels exalts? Praised are simplicity, purity, innocence, doctrine, modesty, humility, the integrity of mind and flesh, in other words, the untainted virginity" (In *Canticum Canticorum* 4, 1-6, CCL 26, pp. 69-70). Rupert's Marian interpretation of the Canticum is a good example of the harmony between liturgy and theology. In fact, several passages of this biblical Book were already used in the liturgical celebrations of Marian feasts.

Moreover, Rupert took care to insert his Mariological doctrine in ecclesiological doctrine. In other words, he saw in Mary Most Holy the most holy part of the whole Church. See why my venerated predecessor, Pope Paul VI, in the closing address of the third session of the Second Vatican Council, solemnly proclaiming Mary Mother of the Church, quoted in fact a proposal treated in Rupert's works, who describes Mary as *portio maxima, portio optima* -- the loftiest part, the best part of the Church (cf. In *Apocalypsem* 1.7, PL 169, 1043). ...

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In our catechesis on the Christian culture of the Middle Ages, we now turn to Rupert of Deutz, an outstanding theologian of the twelfth century. ... His teaching on the dignity and privileges of the Virgin Mary, presented with a broad ecclesiological context, would prove influential for later theology and find an echo in the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council. ...

[In Italian, he said:]

Finally, I greet young people, the sick and newlyweds. The solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, which we celebrated yesterday, reminds us of Mary's singular adherence to God's salvific plan. Dear young people, make an effort to imitate her with a pure and transparent heart, letting yourselves be molded by God who also in you wills to "do great things" (cf. Luke 1:49). Dear sick people, with the help of Mary always trust the Lord, who knows your sufferings and, uniting them to his, offers them for the salvation of the world. And you, dear newlyweds, make your home in imitation of that of Nazareth, welcoming and open to life.

On Christian Joy and the Nativity Scene: "The Crche Is a School of Life." - *Angelus Address*, December 13, 2009

...We look at the crche: The Madonna and St. Joseph do not seem to be a very fortunate family; they had their first child in the midst of great hardships; and yet they are full of deep joy, because they love each other, they help each other and above all they are certain that God is at work in their history, God who made himself present in the little Jesus. ...

This God is manifested in Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary. This is why that Baby, whom we place in the stable or the cave, is the center of everything, the heart of the world. Let us pray that every person, like the Virgin Mary, may welcome into the center of their lives the God who became a Child, font of true joy.

"Helping Others to See the True Face of God Is the First Form of Love." - *Address to University Students*, December 17, 2009

... In the fullness of time, this Wisdom took on a human Face, the Face of Jesus, who as recited in the Apostle's Creed "was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell; the third day he rose again

from the dead; He ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the God the Father Almighty; from hence he shall come to judge the living and the dead."

... At this point I cannot omit to reflect on something a bit disquieting but nevertheless useful for us here who belong to the academic world. Let us ask ourselves: who was present on Christmas night at the grotto in Bethlehem? Who welcomed Wisdom when he was born? Who hurried to see him, to recognize him and adore him? They were not doctors of law, scribes or sages. There were Mary and Joseph, and then the shepherds. What does this mean?

Jesus was one day to say: "Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will" (Mt 11: 26); you revealed your mystery to the little ones (cf. Mt 11: 25). But then is there no use in studying? Or is it even harmful, counterproductive in understanding the truth? The two thousand-year-old history of Christianity excludes the latter hypothesis, and suggests to us the correct one: studying entails deepening one's knowledge while maintaining a spirit similar to the "little ones," an ever humble and simple spirit, like that of Mary, the "Seat of Wisdom." How often have we been afraid to draw near to the Grotto in Bethlehem for fear that doing so would be an obstacle to our critical sense and to our "modernity"! Rather, in that Grotto, each of us can discover the truth about God and about humanity, about ourselves. In that Child, born of the Virgin, the two came together: mankind's longing for eternal life softened the heart of God, who was not ashamed to assume the human condition.

... At the conclusion of this Celebration, the Australian university student delegation will consign the Icon of Mary Sedes Sapientiae to the delegation from Africa. Let us entrust to the Most Holy Virgin all university students on the African continent; ...

"Jesus Sees You and Hears You, Even Though You Are Little." - Address to Children of Italian Catholic Action, December 19, 2009

... Dear children, with these sentiments I wish you a happy and holy Christmas. I extend my wishes to your families and to all of Catholic Action and, entrusting you to the protection of the Mother of Jesus, I bless you all from my heart.

On Bethlehem, City-Symbol of Peace: "A Peace That Is Laboriously Sought and Awaited" - *Angelus Address, December 20, 2009*

... Luke's Gospel says that Jesus was born in Bethlehem because Joseph, the husband of Mary, being "of the house of David," had to return there for the census, and it was then that Mary gave birth to Jesus (cf. Luke 2:1-7).

... We are expected to throw open the doors to welcome him. Let us learn from Mary and Joseph: Let us put ourselves at the service of God's plan with faith. Even if we do not fully understand it, let us entrust ourselves to his wisdom and goodness. Let us first seek the Kingdom of God and Providence will help us. Merry Christmas, everyone!

[In English, he said:]

... We heard in today's Gospel about Mary's journey to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Just as Mary travelled through the hill country of Judah, to share with her kinswoman the joyful news of Christ's coming, so too the Church is called to journey through history, proclaiming the wondrous message of salvation. ...

Christmas Message: "God Still Kindles Fires in the Night of the World." - *Urbi et orbi, December 25, 2009*

... At first, beside the manger in Bethlehem, that "us" was almost imperceptible to human eyes. As the Gospel of Saint Luke recounts, it included, in addition to Mary and Joseph, a few lowly shepherds who came to the cave after hearing the message of the Angels....

The Church, like the Virgin Mary, offers the world Jesus, the Son, whom she herself has received as a gift, the One who came to set mankind free from the slavery of sin. Like Mary, the Church does not fear, for that Child is her strength. But she does not keep him for herself: she offers him to all those who seek him with a sincere heart, to the earth's lowly and afflicted, to the victims of violence, and to all who yearn for peace....

On St. Stephen the Martyr: "Loving the Poor Is One of the Privileged Ways to Live the Gospel" Angelus Address, December 26, 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today, our minds still filled with wonder and bathed in the light that shines from the Grotto of Bethlehem where with Mary, Joseph and the shepherds we adored our Savior, we are commemorating the Deacon St Stephen, the first Christian martyr. ...

The Feast of St Stephen reminds us also of the many believers in various parts of the world who, because of their faith, are subjected to trials and suffering. While we entrust them to his heavenly protection, let us strive to sustain them with prayer and never to fall short of our Christian vocation, always placing at the centre of our life Jesus Christ, whom in these days we contemplate in the simplicity and humility of the manger. Let us invoke for this the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer and Queen of Martyrs, with the prayer of the Angelus.

On Feast of Holy Family: "Children Are a Gift and a Project of God" December 27, 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today is Holy Family Sunday. We can still identify ourselves with the shepherds of Bethlehem who hastened to the grotto as soon as they had received the Angel's announcement and found "Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in the manger" (Lk 2: 16). Let us too pause to contemplate this scene and

reflect on its meaning. The first witnesses of Christ's birth, the shepherds, found themselves not only before the Infant Jesus but also a small family: mother, father and newborn son. God had chosen to reveal himself by being born into a human family and the human family thus became an icon of God! God is the Trinity, he is a communion of love; so is the family despite all the differences that exist between the Mystery of God and his human creature, an expression that reflects the unfathomable Mystery of God as Love. In marriage the man and the woman, created in God's image, become "one flesh" (Gen 2: 24), that is a communion of love that generates new life. The human family, in a certain sense, is an icon of the Trinity because of its interpersonal love and the fruitfulness of this love.

Today's Liturgy presents the famous Gospel episode of the 12-year-old Jesus who stays behind in the Temple in Jerusalem unbeknown to his parents who, surprised and anxious, discover him three days later conversing with the teachers. Jesus answers his Mother who asks for an explanation that he must "be in his Father's house" that is God's house (cf. Lk 2: 49). In this episode the boy Jesus appears to us full of zeal for God and for the Temple. Let us ask ourselves: from whom did Jesus learn love for his Father's affairs? As Son he certainly had an intimate knowledge of his Father, of God, and a profound and permanent relationship with him but, in his own culture he had of course learned prayers and love for the Temple and for the Institutions of Israel from his parents. We may therefore say that Jesus' decision to stay on at the Temple was above all the result of his close relationship with the Father, but it was also a result of the education he had received from Mary and Joseph. Here we can glimpse the authentic meaning of Christian education: it is the fruit of a collaboration between educators and God that must always be sought. The Christian family is aware that children are a gift and a project of God. Therefore it cannot consider that it possesses them; rather, in serving God's plan through them, the family is called to educate them in the greatest freedom, which is

precisely that of saying "yes" to God in order to do his will. The Virgin Mary is the perfect example of this "yes". Let us entrust all families to her, praying in particular for their precious educational mission.

And I now address in Spanish all those who are taking part in the Feast of the Holy Family in Madrid. ... I then encourage you so that, trusting in the motherly intercession of Mary Most Holy, Queen of Families, and under the powerful protection of St Joseph, her spouse, you may dedicate yourselves tirelessly to this beautiful mission which the Lord has placed in your hands. ...

[After the Angelus:]

I am happy to greet all the English-speaking visitors present at this Angelus prayer. Today we celebrate with joy the Feast of the Holy Family, who shared with us this fundamental human experience. I pray that the Lord may bless all Christian families and assist them in living their daily life in mutual love and in generosity to others, after the example of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. ...

"Whoever Serves and Helps Is at the Same Time Helped and Served" - Address at Sant'Egidio's Soup Kitchen, December 27, 2009

... I invoke the protection of the Virgin of the Visitation, who teaches us to go "promptly" to help brethren in their needs, and I bless you all affectionately.

"Make an Effective Contribution to Building up the Church" - Homily for End-of-Year Liturgy, December 31, 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At the end of a year full of events for both the Church and the world we are meeting this evening in the Vatican Basilica to celebrate First Vespers of the Solemnity of Mary Mother of God and to raise a

hymn of thanksgiving to the Lord of time and history.

...

With the Incarnation of the Son of God, eternity entered time and human history was opened to absolute fulfillment in God. Time was, so to speak, "touched" by Christ, the Son of God and of Mary, and received from him new and surprising significance: it became a time of salvation and grace. ...

As we take our leave of the year that is ending and set out towards the new one, today's Liturgy ushers us into the Solemnity of Mary Most Holy, Mother of God. The Blessed Virgin is Mother of the Church and Mother of each one of her members, that is, Mother of each of us, in Christ. Let us ask her to accompany us with her caring protection, today and forever, so that Christ may one day welcome us into his glory, into the assembly of the Saints: *Aeterna fac cum sanctis tuis in gloria numerari. Alleluia! Amen!*