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Pope Benedict XVI

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## *December 2010*



### *On Julian of Norwich: "God's Promises Are Always Greater Than Our Hopes" – General Audience December 1, 2010*

... The time of Advent, just begun, presents to us in these days the shining example of the Immaculate Virgin. May she be the one to spur you, dear young people, on your path of constant adherence to Christ; for you, dear sick, may Mary be the sustenance for a renewed hope; and for you, dear newlyweds, may the Mother of Jesus be your guide in building your family on the solid rock of faith. ...

We ask the Blessed Virgin Mary, Help of Christians, to support all the Chinese bishops, so dear to me, so that they will give witness to their faith with courage, placing every hope in the Savior we await. Moreover, we entrust to the Virgin all the Catholics of that beloved country so that, with her intercession, they will be able to live an authentic Christian existence in communion with the

universal Church, thus contributing also to the harmony and common good of their noble people.

*"Faith ... Is a Purifying Force for Reason" -  
Address to New Hungarian Envoy Gabor  
Gyorivanyi, December 2, 2010*

... May Mary Most Holy, the "Magna Domina Hungarorum," stretch her protecting hand over your country. From my heart I implore for you, Mr. Ambassador, for your family and for your men and women collaborators in the embassy, and for all the Hungarian people, the abundant divine blessing.

*On St. John the Baptist: "A Star That Shines  
Before the Rising of the Sun" – General  
Audience, December 5, 2010*

... The Virgin Mary is the model of listening: "As we contemplate in the Mother of God a life totally shaped by the word, we realize that we too are called to enter into the mystery of faith, whereby Christ comes to dwell in our lives. Every Christian believer, St. Ambrose reminds us, in some way interiorly conceives and gives birth to the word of God" (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Verbum Domini," No. 28). ...

Let us ask the Virgin Mary, in whose womb the Son of the Most High dwelt, and for whom on Wednesday, Dec. 8 we celebrate the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, to sustain us in this spiritual journey, to welcome the coming of the Lord with faith and with love.

[In English he said]

... May Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, grant us his grace so that during this time of Advent we may grow ever more faithful to his unfailing love.

*On the Immaculate Conception: "Grace Is  
Greater Than Sin ... God's Mercy Is More  
Powerful Than Evil" – Angelus Address,*

**December 8, 2010**

Today our meeting on the occasion of the prayer of the Angelus acquires a special light, in the context of the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. In the liturgy of this feast, the Gospel of the Annunciation is proclaimed (Luke 1:26-38), which presents, precisely, the dialogue between the angel Gabriel and the Virgin. "Rejoice! Full of grace, the Lord is with thee," says God's messenger, and in this way reveals Mary's most profound identity, the "name" so to speak with which God himself knows her: "full of grace."

This expression, which is so familiar to us from our childhood, as we say it every time we pray the Hail Mary, explains to us the mystery that we celebrate today. In fact, from the moment she was conceived by her parents, Mary was the object of a singular predilection on the part of God, who in his eternal plan chose her to be the mother of his Son made man and, hence, preserved her from original sin. For this reason, the angel addresses her with this name, which implicitly signifies "ever full of the love of God," of his grace. The mystery of the Immaculate Conception is source of interior light, of hope and of consolation. In the midst of life's trials, and especially of the contradictions man experiences in his interior and around him, Mary, Mother of Christ, tells us that Grace is greater than sin, that God's mercy is more powerful than evil, and it is able to transform it into goodness.

Unfortunately, we experience evil every day, which manifests itself in many ways in relations and events, but which has its root in man's heart, a wounded, sick heart, incapable of curing itself. Sacred Scripture reveals to us that at the origin of all evil is disobedience to the will of God, and that death has prevailed because human liberty has yielded to the temptation of the Evil One. However, God does not fail in his plan of love and life: through a long and patient path of reconciliation, he has prepared the new and eternal Covenant, sealed with the blood of his Son, who to offer himself in expiation "was

born of woman." (Galatians 4:4)

This woman, the Virgin Mary, benefited in advance from the redeeming death of her Son and from conception was preserved from the contagion of guilt. Because of this, with her immaculate heart, she says to us: Trust Jesus, he saves you. Dear friends, this afternoon I will renew the traditional homage to the Immaculate Virgin, before the monument dedicated to her, in Piazza di Spagna. With this act of devotion I make myself interpreter of the love of the faithful of Rome and of the whole world for the Mother that Christ has given us. I entrust to her intercession the most urgent needs of the Church and of the world. May she help us above all to have faith in God, to believe in his Word, to always reject evil and choose the good.

[In Italian, he said:]

In today's feast, I have the joy of greeting the Pontifical Academy of the Immaculate. Dear friends, I invoke on each one of you the maternal protection of the Virgin Mary and I commend your activity to her intercession. I thank you for your generous work. ...

[In English, he said:]

... Today the Church joyfully celebrates the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. By her prayers, may our hearts and minds be kept free from sin, so that like Mary we may be spiritually prepared to welcome Christ. Let us turn to her, the Immaculate, who brought Christ to us, and ask her now to bring us to Him.

*"Her 'Message' Is None Other Than Jesus, Who Is Her Whole Life" - Address upon Visiting Marian Statue in Piazza di Spagna, December 8, 2010*

... Also this year we have made an appointment here, in Piazza di Spagna, to render homage to the Immaculate Virgin, on the occasion of her solemn feast. ... We are gathered around this historic

monument, which today is all surrounded by flowers, sign of the love and devotion of the Roman people for the Mother of Jesus. And the most beautiful gift, and most pleasing to her, that we offer is our prayer, the one we bear in our hearts and which we entrust to her intercession. They are invocations of gratitude and supplication: of gratitude for the gift of faith and for all the good that we receive daily from God; and supplication for our different needs, for the family, health, work, for every difficulty that life has us encounter.

But when we come here, especially on this feast of Dec. 8, much more important is what we receive from Mary, in comparison to what we offer her. In fact, she gives a message destined to each one of us, to the city of Rome and to the entire world. Also I, who am bishop of this city, come to listen, not only for myself but for all. And what does Mary say to us? She speaks to us with the Word of God, which became flesh in her womb. Her "message" is none other than Jesus, who is her whole life. It is thanks to Him and because of Him that she is immaculate. And as the Son of God became man for us, so she too, the Mother, was preserved from sin for us, for all, in anticipation of God's salvation for every man.

Thus Mary says to us that we are all called to open ourselves to the action of the Holy Spirit to be able to reach, our final destination, to be immaculate, fully and definitively free of evil. She says so with her sanctity itself, with a look full of hope and compassion, which evokes words such as these: "Fear not, son, God loves you! He loves you personally; he thought of you before you came into the world and called you into existence to fill you with love and life; and because of this, he has come to meet you, he made himself like you, he became Jesus, God-Man, in everything similar to you, but without sin; he gave himself for you, to the point of dying on the cross, and thus has given you a new life, free, holy and immaculate." (cf. Ephesians 1:3-5)

Mary gives us this message and when I come here, on this feast, it strikes me, because I feel it is

addressed to the whole city, to all men and women who live in Rome: also those who are not thinking, who today do not even remember that it is the feast of the Immaculate, and who feel alone and abandoned. Mary's look is God's look on each one of us. She looks at us with the very love of the Father and blesses us. She behaves as our "advocate" -- and we invoke her thus in the Salve, Regina," our advocate." Even if everyone spoke evil of us, she, the Mother, would say the good, because her immaculate heart is attuned to God's mercy. Thus she sees the city: not as an anonymous agglomeration, but as a constellation where God knows everyone personally by name, one by one, and calls us to shine with his light. And those that in the eyes of the world are the first, for God they are the last; those who are little, are great for God. He recognizes in each one the likeness with his Son Jesus, even if we are so different! But who more than she knows the power of Divine Grace? Who better than she knows that nothing is impossible for God, capable in fact of drawing good from evil?

Dear brothers and sisters, the message we receive here, at the feet of Mary Immaculate, is a message of trust for every person of this city and of the whole world. A message of hope not made of words, but of her own history: she is one of us, who gave birth to the Son of God and has shared all her own existence with him! And today she says to us: this is also your destiny, yours, the destiny of all: to be saints as our Father, to be immaculate as our Brother Jesus Christ, to be loved children, all adopted to form a great family, without limits of nationality, color, language, because God is one, Father of every man.

Thank you, O Mary Immaculate, for always being with us! Always watch over our city: comfort the sick, encourage young people, sustain families. Infuse the strength to reject evil, in every form, and to choose the good, even when it costs and entails going against the current. Give us the joy of feeling loved by God, blessed by Him, predestined to be his children. Immaculate Virgin, our sweetest Mother, pray for us!

*"Try to Grow Evermore in Communion with Everyone" - Homily at Diocesan Parish of St. Maximilian Kolbe of the Diocese of Rome, December 12, 2010*

... Our spirit must open up to this invitation and thus we walk with joy to meet Christmas, imitating the Virgin Mary, who waited in prayer, with intimate and joyous trepidation, the birth of the Redeemer. Amen!

*On the Third Sunday of Advent: "The Word of the Lord Does Not Pass" – Angelus Address, December 12, 2010*

... May the Virgin Mary, whom the Gospel calls blessed because she believed that the Lord's words would be accomplished (cf. Luke 1:45), obtain this for us.

*On St. Veronica Giuliani: "She Interpreted Everything in a Key of Love" – General Audience, December 15, 2010*

... Also with the Virgin Mary, Veronica lived a relationship of profound intimacy, attested by the words she heard Our Lady say one day and which she reports in her Diary: "I will make you rest on my breast, you are united with my soul, and from it you were taken as in flight to God." (IV, 901)

*"Mary ... Is the Sign of Sure Hope and Consolation for the People of God" - Address to Pontifical Academies (sent to the members of the Pontifical Academies during their fifteenth Public Session, which reflected on the topic: "The Assumption of Mary, Sign of Consolation and Sure Hope"), December 15, 2010*

... The fifteenth Public Session was prepared by the International Pontifical Marian Academy and by the Pontifical Academy of the Immaculate, which very opportunely have desired that in this solemn meeting the sixtieth anniversary be recalled of the



proclamation of the Dogma of the Assumption of Mary, proposing the theme: "The Assumption of Mary, Sign of Consolation and Sure Hope." On Nov. 1, 1950, in fact, during a memorable Jubilee, the Venerable Pius XII, promulgating the apostolic constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*, proclaimed this dogma solemnly in St. Peter's Square. A few years before, in 1946, Father Carlo Balic, O.F.M., had founded the International Marian Academy precisely to support and coordinate the Assumptionist movement.

In the difficult and delicate historical moment that followed the conclusion of World War II, with that solemn gesture, Pius XII wished to indicate not only to Catholics, but to all men and women of good will, the singular figure of Mary as model and paradigm of the new humanity redeemed by Christ: "It is to be hoped," he said, "that all those who will meditate the glorious examples of Mary will be persuaded increasingly of the value of human life [...] and that the luminous form be placed before everyone's eyes of the lofty end to which souls and bodies are destined; finally, that faith in the bodily Assumption of Mary to Heaven make faith in our resurrection more firm and active" (*Munificentissimus Deus*, AAS 42, 1950, 753-771). I consider these hopes most timely, and I also invite you all to allow yourselves to be guided by Mary to be heralds and witnesses of the hope that springs from contemplation of the mysteries of Christ, dead and risen for our salvation.

Mary, in fact, as Vatican Council II teaches in the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*, is the sign of sure hope and consolation for the People of God, pilgrim in history: "The mother of Jesus, now in heaven, glorified in body and soul, is the image and the first fruit of the Church which must have its fulfillment in the future age, and thus shines over the earth as a sign of sure hope and consolation for the People of God, journeying until it sees the day of the Lord." (cf. 2 Peter 3:10) (No. 68) In the encyclical letter *Spe Salvi*, dedicated to Christian hope, I could not help but remind of the particular role of Mary in supporting and guiding the way of believers toward

the Heavenly homeland. I addressed her, invoking her as a Star of Hope for the Church and for the whole of humanity (cf. No. 49). Mary is the shining star of light and beauty, who proclaims and anticipates our future.

St. John Damascene, who dedicated to Mary's Assumption three magnificent sermons, given in Jerusalem around the year 740, in the place tradition indicates as Mary's Tomb, said this: "Thy soul did not descend to Limbo, neither did thy flesh see corruption. Thy pure and spotless body was not left in the earth, but the abode of the Queen, of God's true Mother, was fixed in the heavenly kingdom alone." ("Homily I on the Dormition" PG 96, 719) The "singer of Mary," St. Bernard of Clairvaux, along with many of the Latin West, echoes the previous voice of the Eastern Church, when St. Bernard evokes the Assumption thus: "Our Queen has preceded us; she has preceded us and has been received very festively, so that with confidence the servants can follow their Lady saying: Take us with you, we run in the odor of your perfumes (Ct 1,3). Our pilgrim humanity sent its Advocate ahead that, being Mother of the Judge and Mother of mercy, she can treat with devotion and efficacy the cause of our salvation. Our earth has sent today to heaven a precious gift so that, giving and receiving, they join the human and the divine in a happy exchange of friendship, the earthly to the heavenly, the lowest to the highest [...] She is the Queen of Heaven, she is merciful, she is the Mother of the Only-begotten Son of God" ("In assumptione B.M.V". Sermo I: PL 183,415)

Hence, following that *via pulchritudinis* that the Servant of God Paul VI indicated as fecund itinerary of theological and Mariological research, I would like to note the profound syntony between theological and mystical thought, the liturgy, Marian devotion and the works of art that, with the splendor of colors and shapes, sing the mystery of the Assumption of Mary and her heavenly glory together with her Son. Among the latter, I invite you to admire two of them that are particularly significant in Rome: the mosaics

of the apse of the Marian Basilicas of St. Mary Major and Santa Maria in Trastevere.

Theological and spiritual reflection, liturgy, Marian devotion, and artistic representation truly form a whole, a complete and effective message, capable of arousing the wonder of eyes, of touching the heart and of enticing the intelligence to a more profound understanding of the mystery of Mary in which we see our destiny reflected clearly and our hope proclaimed. Therefore, I take advantage of this occasion to invite experts in theology and Mariology to follow the *via pulchritudinis*, and I hope that, also in our days, thanks to a greater collaboration between theologians, liturgists and artists, incisive and effective messages can be offered to the admiration and contemplation of all.

To encourage all those who wish to make their own contribution to the promotion and realization of a new Christian humanism, taking up the proposal formulated by the Council of Coordination, I am happy to assign "ex aequo" the Prize of the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academies to the Marian Academy of India, young and active Marian-Mariological Society with headquarters in Bangalore, India -- represented by its president, the Rev. Kulandaisamy Rayar -- and to professor Luis Alberto Esteves dos Santos Casimiro for his powerful doctoral dissertation entitled "A Anunciacao do Senhor na pintura quincentista portuguesa (1500-1550): Analise geometrica, iconografica e significado iconologico."

Moreover, I wish that, as a sign of appreciation and encouragement, the Medal of the Pontificate be offered to the "Gen Verde" Group, expression of the Focolare Movement, for its artistic commitment strongly permeated by evangelical values and open to dialogue between peoples and cultures.

Wishing you, finally, an ever more passionate commitment in your respective fields of activity, I entrust each one of you and your work to the maternal protection of the Virgin Mary, the *Tota*

*Pulchra*, the Star of Hope, and impart from my heart to you, Lord Cardinal, and to all those present a special Apostolic Blessing.

In the Vatican, Dec. 15, 2010

BENEDICTUS PP XVI

*"Harmony is Possible Within Countries and Between People" – address to the new ambassador from Andorra to the Holy See, Miquel Àngel Canturri Montanya, December 16, 2010*

... The people of Andorra have a particular veneration for the Virgin Mary, the Virgin of Meritxell, patroness of the co-principality whose national feast is celebrated on Sept. 8, Marian solemnity.

I entrust the authorities of your country and the whole of the population to her maternal protection.

*"The Cross Is God's 'Yes' to Mankind" - Message for 2011 World Day of the Sick, to be observed Feb. 11, on the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes and published on December 18, 2010*

Dear brothers and sisters!

Every year, on the occasion of the memorial of the Blessed Virgin of Lourdes, which is celebrated on Feb.

11, the Church proposes the World Day of the Sick. ... May the initiatives that individual dioceses promote on the occasion of this day be a stimulus to make care for the suffering more and more effective, also in view of the solemn celebration that will take place at the Marian shrine in Altötting in Germany.

...

May the Virgin Mary keep watch over you together with him. We invoke her confidently under the titles Health of the Infirm and Consoler of the Suffering. At the foot of the cross there is realized through her Simeon's prophecy: her Mother's heart is pierced (cf. Luke 2:35). From the abyss of her pain, a

participation in her Son's, Mary is made capable of accepting her new mission: to become the Mother of Christ in his members. In the hour of the cross Jesus presents her to all of his disciples: "Behold your son." (cf. John 19:26-27) The maternal compassion for the Son becomes maternal compassion for each one of us in our daily sufferings (cf. Homily at Lourdes, Sept. 15, 2008).

From the Vatican, Nov. 21, 2010, Feast of Christ the King of the Universe

BENEDICTUS PP XVI

*On St. Joseph, the Legal Father of Jesus: He "Looks to the Future with Confidence and Courage" – Angelus Address, December 19, 2010*

On this fourth Sunday of Advent the Gospel of St. Matthew tells us how the birth of Jesus came about, taking the perspective of St. Joseph. He was the betrothed of Mary, who, "before they lived together, was found to be with child by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 1:18) The Son of God, realizing an ancient prophecy (cf. Isaiah 7:14), became man in the womb of a virgin, and such a mystery simultaneously manifests the love, wisdom and power of God on behalf of humanity wounded by sin. St. Joseph is presented as a "just man" (Matthew 1:19), faithful to God's law, ready to do his will. On account of this he enters into the mystery of the Incarnation after an angel of the Lord appears to him in a dream and tells him: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife with you. In fact the child that has been conceived in her comes from the Holy Spirit; she will give birth to a son and you will call him Jesus: he in fact will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:20-21) Forgetting the thought of repudiating Mary in secret, he takes her in because his eyes now see the work of God in her.

St. Ambrose comments that "in Joseph there was amiability and the figure of a just man to make the

quality of his witness more worthy." (Exp. Ev. sec. Lucam II, 5: CCL 14,32-33) "He," Ambrose continues, "could not have contaminated the temple of the Holy Spirit, the Mother of the Lord, the fruitful womb of the mystery." (ibid. II, 6: CCL 14, 33) Although he had been concerned, Joseph "did as the angel of the Lord ordered him," certain of doing the right thing. Also giving the name "Jesus" to that child who rules the entire universe, he enters into the ranks of the faithful and humble servants, like the angels and prophets, like the martyrs and the apostles -- in the words of ancient eastern hymns. St. Joseph proclaims the wonders of the Lord, witnessing Mary's virginity, the gratuitous deed of God, and caring for the earthly life of the Messiah. So, we venerate the legal father of Jesus (*Code of Canon Law*, 532), because the new man takes form in him, who looks to the future with confidence and courage, does not follow his own project, but entrusts himself totally to the infinite mercy of him who fulfills the prophecies and inaugurates the season of salvation.

... Let us invoke the Virgin Mary with confidence, the one who is full of grace, "adorned by God," so that at Christmas, which is already near, our eyes may open and see Jesus, and the heart rejoice in this wondrous encounter of love.

[In English he said:]

... We heard in today's Gospel about the promise made to Joseph, that his wife Mary was to bear a child who would save his people from their sins. This child would be called Emmanuel, meaning that from now on, God is truly with us, he lives among us and shares our joys and sorrows, our hopes and our fears. ...

*Christmas Greeting to Curia: "For All Its New Hopes and Possibilities, Our World Is ... Troubled" – December 20, 2010*

... I entrust these prayerful sentiments to the intercession of the Holy Virgin, Mother of the Redeemer, and I impart to all of you and to the great

family of the Roman Curia a heartfelt Apostolic Blessing. Happy Christmas!

*"In the Weakness of Infancy, He Is the Mighty God"* - **Christmas Eve Homily, December 24, 2010 celebrated in St. Peter's Basilica**

... "Mary gave birth to her first-born son." (Lk 2:7) In this sentence Saint Luke recounts quite soberly the great event to which the prophecies from Israel's history had pointed. Luke calls the child the "first-born". In the language which developed within the sacred Scripture of the Old Covenant, "first-born" does not mean the first of a series of children. The word "first-born" is a title of honor, quite independently of whether other brothers and sisters follow or not. So Israel is designated by God in the Book of Exodus (4:22) as "my first-born Son," and this expresses Israel's election, its singular dignity, the particular love of God the Father. The early Church knew that in Jesus this saying had acquired a new depth, that the promises made to Israel were summed up in him. Thus the Letter to the Hebrews calls Jesus "the first-born," simply in order to designate him as the Son sent into the world by God (cf. 1:5-7) after the ground had been prepared by Old Testament prophecy. The first-born belongs to God in a special way – and therefore he had to be handed over to God in a special way – as in many religions – and he had to be ransomed through a vicarious sacrifice, as Saint Luke recounts in the episode of the Presentation in the Temple. The first-born belongs to God in a special way, and is as it were destined for sacrifice. In Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross this destiny of the first-born is fulfilled in a unique way. In his person he brings humanity before God and unites man with God in such a way that God becomes all in all. Saint Paul amplified and deepened the idea of Jesus as first-born in the Letters to the Colossians and to the Ephesians: Jesus, we read in these letters, is the first-born of all creation – the true prototype of man, according to which God formed the human creature. Man can be the image of God because Jesus is both God and

man, the true image of God and of man. Furthermore, as these letters tell us, he is the first-born from the dead. In the resurrection he has broken down the wall of death for all of us. He has opened up to man the dimension of eternal life in fellowship with God. Finally, it is said to us that he is the first-born of many brothers. Yes indeed, now he really is the first of a series of brothers and sisters: the first, that is, who opens up for us the possibility of communing with God. He creates true brotherhood – not the kind defiled by sin as in the case of Cain and Abel, or Romulus and Remus, but the new brotherhood in which we are God's own family. This new family of God begins at the moment when Mary wraps her first-born in swaddling clothes and lays him in a manger. ...

*"May the Birth of the Savior Open Horizons of Lasting Peace"*

**- Christmas Message "urbi et orbi" (to the city of Rome and the world), December 25, 2010.**

... The Incarnation is the culmination of creation. When Jesus, the Son of God incarnate, was formed in the womb of Mary by the will of the Father and the working of the Holy Spirit, creation reached its high point. The ordering principle of the universe, the Logos, began to exist in the world, in a certain time and space. ...

*On the Holy Family: "That Every Child Coming Into the World Be Welcomed by the Warmth of a Family" - Angelus Address, December 26, 2010*

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

The Gospel according to Luke recounts that when the shepherds of Bethlehem had received the Angel's announcement of the Messiah's birth "they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger." (2:16) The first eyewitnesses of Jesus' birth therefore beheld a family scene: a mother, a father and a newborn son. For this reason the Liturgy has us celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family on the First Sunday after



Christmas. This year it occurred the very day after Christmas, and, taking precedence over the Feast of St Stephen, invites us to contemplate this "icon" in which the little Jesus appears at the centre of his parents' affection and care.

In the poor grotto of Bethlehem -- the Fathers of the Church wrote -- shines a very bright light, a reflection of the profound mystery which envelopes that Child, which Mary and Joseph cherish in their hearts and which can be seen in their expression, in their actions, and especially in their silence. Indeed, they preserve in their inmost depths the words of the Angel's Annunciation to Mary: "the Child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." (Lk 1:35)

Yet every child's birth brings something of this mystery with it! Parents who receive a child as a gift know this well and often speak of it in this way. We have all heard people say to a father and a mother: "this child is a gift, a miracle!" Indeed, human beings do not experience procreation merely as a reproductive act but perceive its richness and intuit that every human creature who is born on earth is the "sign" par excellence of the Creator and Father who is in Heaven.

How important it is, therefore, that every child coming into the world be welcomed by the warmth of a family! External comforts do not matter: Jesus was born in a stable and had a manger as his first cradle, but the love of Mary and of Joseph made him feel the tenderness and beauty of being loved. Children need this: the love of their father and mother. It is this that gives them security and, as they grow, enables them to discover the meaning of life. The Holy Family of Nazareth went through many trials, such as the "massacre of the innocents" -- as recounted in the Gospel according to Matthew -- which obliged Joseph and Mary to flee to Egypt (cf. 2:13-23). Yet, trusting in divine Providence, they found their stability and guaranteed Jesus a serene childhood and a sound upbringing.

Dear friends, the Holy Family is of course unique

and unrepeatable, but at the same time it is a "model of life" for every family because Jesus, true man, chose to be born into a human family and thereby blessed and consecrated it. Let us therefore entrust all families to Our Lady and to St. Joseph, so that they do not lose heart in the face of trials and difficulties but always cultivate conjugal love and devote themselves with trust to the service of life and education.

[After reciting the Angelus, the Holy Father made the following appeal:]

Over this Christmas period, the desire and calls for the gift of peace have become more intense. Yet our world continues to be marked by violence, especially against the disciples of Christ. I learned with great sadness of the attack on a Catholic church in the Philippines during the celebration of the Christmas liturgy, as well as attacks against Christian churches in Nigeria. The earth has also been stained with blood in other parts of the world, such as Pakistan. I wish to express my heartfelt condolences for the victims of this absurd violence, and I once again reiterate my appeal to abandon the path of hatred in order to find peaceful solutions to conflicts and bring security and tranquillity to those dear people. On this day in which we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family, who underwent the dramatic experience of having to flee into Egypt because of the murderous fury of Herod, let us remember all those, especially families, who are forced to abandon their homes because of war, violence and intolerance. I invite you, therefore, to join me in praying fervently that the Lord may touch people's hearts and bring hope, reconciliation and peace

[The Holy Father then greeted those present in various languages. In English, he said:]

I am pleased to greet all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present for this Angelus prayer on the Feast of the Holy Family. Reflecting on the

love of Jesus, Mary and Joseph for one another, we see that Nazareth is a kind of school where we may begin to discover the life of Christ and to understand his Gospel.

*" On St. Catherine of Bologna: "She Identifies Seven Weapons in the Fight Against Evil"-*  
**General Audience, December 29, 2010**

... In 1431 she had a vision of the Last Judgement. The terrifying spectacle of the damned impelled her to redouble her prayers and penance for the salvation of sinners. The devil continued to assail her and she entrusted herself ever more totally to the Lord and to the Virgin Mary (cf. *ibid.*, X, 3, pp. 53-54).

*I Feel More Strongly in My Heart the Need to Raise Our 'Thanks' to Him" - Homily at Vespers for the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God,*  
**December 31, 2010**

Dear brothers and sisters!

At the conclusion of a year, we find ourselves this evening in the Vatican Basilica to celebrate First Vespers of the Solemnity of Mary Most Holy Mother of God and raise a hymn of thanksgiving to God for the many graces that he has granted us, but also and above all for Grace in person, that is, for the living and personal gift of the Father, who is his beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is precisely this gratitude for the gifts received from God in the time that is given us to live that helps us to discover a great good that is inscribed in time: marked in its yearly, monthly, weekly and daily rhythms, it is inhabited by the love of God, by his gifts of grace: it is time of salvation. Yes, the eternal God entered into and remains in the time of man. He entered here and remains here in the person of Jesus, the Son of God made man, the Savior of the world. This is what the Apostle Paul pointed out to us in the brief reading that was just proclaimed: "In the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son ... we might

receive adoption as sons." (Galatians 4:4-5)...

The Word of God, in fact, was made flesh for all, and his truth is accessible to every man and every culture. ... It is always Mary Most Holy, the Mother of God who gives us Christ, our Hope. As she already did to the shepherds and the magi, her hands, and still more her heart, continue to offer the world Jesus, her Son and our Savior. ...