

Excerpts from

Pope John Paul II - General Audience Talk - Wednesday 14 March 2001 *Mary Shows Way to Full Union With God*



1. We began our meeting hearing one of the most well-known pages of John's Apocalypse. In the pregnant woman, who gives birth to a son, before a blood-red colored dragon that rages against her and against him whom she generated, Christian liturgical and artistic tradition has seen the image of Mary, the Mother of Christ. However, according to the primary intention of the sacred author, if the birth of the baby represents the advent of the Messiah, the woman obviously personifies the people of God, whether biblical Israel or the Church. The Marian interpretation is not opposed to the ecclesial meaning of the text since Mary is a "figure of the Church" ("Lumen Gentium," 63; see St. Ambrose, Expos. Lk, II, 7).

Therefore, in the depths of the faithful community, the profile of the Mother of the Messiah is perceived. The dragon, who evokes Satan and evil, rises against Mary and the Church, as already indicated in the symbolism of the Old Testament; red is the sign of war, slaughter, spilt blood; the "seven heads" crowned indicate a tremendous power, while the "ten horns" recall the impressive strength of the beast described by the prophet Daniel (see 7:7), also the image of the prevaricator's power that rages in history.

2. Thus, good and evil confront one another. Mary, her Son and the Church represent the apparent weakness and littleness of love, truth and justice. Against them is unleashed the monstrous devastating energy of violence, falsehood and injustice. However, the song that seals the passage reminds us that the final verdict is entrusted to "the salvation, strength, the Kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ" (Apocalypse 12:10).

Certainly, in the time of history the Church might be obliged to seek refuge in the desert, as ancient Israel did on the way to the promised land. Among other things, the desert is a traditional shelter for the persecuted, it is the secret and serene ambit where divine protection is offered (see Genesis 21:14-19; 1 Kings 19:4-7). However, the woman remains in this shelter, as the Apocalypse underlines (see 12:6,14), only for a limited period. The time of anguish, of persecution, of trial is not, therefore, indefinite: In the end there will be deliverance and it will be the hour of glory.

Contemplating this mystery from a Marian perspective, we can affirm that "Mary, next to her Son, is the most perfect icon of the liberty and deliverance of humanity and the cosmos. It is to her that the Church, of which she is mother and model, must look to understand the meaning of her mission in its fullness" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Libertatis conscientia," March, 22, 1986, No. 97; see "Redemptoris Mater," No. 37).

3. Let us fix our gaze, then, on Mary, icon of the pilgrim Church in the desert of history, but outstretched to the glorious end of the heavenly Jerusalem where she will shine as the Bride of the Lamb, Christ the Lord. As the Eastern Church celebrates her, the Mother of God is the Odighitria, she who "shows the way," namely Christ, only mediator to lead us fully to the Father. A French poet sees in her "the creature in her first honor and final flowering, as she came from God in the morning of her original splendor" (P. Claudel, "La Vierge à Midi," ed. Pléiade, p. 540).

In her Immaculate Conception, Mary is the perfect model of the human creature who, full from the beginning of that divine grace that sustains and transfigures the creature (see Luke 1:28), always chooses, in her freedom, the way of God. In her glorious Assumption to heaven Mary is, instead, the image of the creature called by the risen Christ to attain, at the end of history, the fullness of communion with God in the resurrection of a blessed eternity. For the Church, which often feels the weight of history and the siege of evil, the Mother of Christ is the luminous emblem of humanity redeemed and enveloped in saving grace.

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5. Let us then sing our hymn of praise to Mary, image of redeemed humanity, sign of the Church that lives in faith and love, anticipating the fullness of the heavenly Jerusalem. "The poetic genius of St. Ephrem of Syria, defined as 'the zither of the Holy Spirit,' has tirelessly sung Mary, leaving a still living impression on all the traditions of the Syrian Church" ("Redemptoris Mater," No. 31). He it is who represents Mary as the icon of beauty: "She is holy in her body, beautiful in her spirit, pure in her thoughts, honest in her intelligence, perfect in her feelings, chaste, firm in her resolutions, immaculate in her heart, eminent, filled with all the virtues" (Hymns to the Virgin Mary 1,4; ed. Th. J. Lamy, Hymns of Blessed Mary, Malines 1886, t. 2, col. 520). May this image shine at the center of every ecclesial community as a perfect reflection of Christ and may it be as a sign raised among the people, as a "city placed at the top of a mountain" and "an oil lamp on a pedestal, to give light to all" (see Matthew 5:14-15).

- The full text can be accessed from our web site.