

**God has not wanted the incarnation for himself but for us**

*The text of a meditation held on December 8, 1988 by Don Divo Barsotti on the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin. To prepare for tomorrow's Solemnity ...*

*[translation from Italian by Liana Sammartino]*

December 8, 1988 Rome Retreat

**God has not wanted the incarnation for himself but for us**

Before stopping to meditate on the mystery that the Church today celebrates, the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, it will be appropriate to say a few words in general on the mystery of Mary.

Pius IX says in the *Ineffabilis Bolla*, by which he proclaims the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, that God from all eternity, before any other thing, wanted the incarnation of the Word, and the blessed Virgin. Why has God wanted to associate in such a way from all eternity Mary to the Son in the mystery of the incarnation that was to be the fulfillment of all the works of God *ad extra*? The answer seems pretty clear, if we think of what the Church proclaims in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan symbol (creed).

In this symbol, it is said that God descended from heaven and was made man *propter nos et propter salutem nostram*. God has not willed the incarnation for himself but for us. This means that the divine design from eternity, was only one: the ineffable union of the creation with God. Therefore, not only the incarnation as the assumption of the human nature, but the assumption of the human nature in order of the gift of self, that the divine Word was willing to do to each created person.

The incarnation could lift our nature to God but it has not yet established a relationship between the person of the Verb and the created persons.

This we can explain if we consider who God is. God is one, but exists in three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, God is not one in his nature, but he is triune in the persons. And he is triune in the persons because he is love. When Saint John tells us that God is love, in this expression we want to emphasize the essential and constitutive attribute of the godhead: he is essentially love. But it could not be love if he were to be a lonely God, if he were only one also as a person. If one loves, there must be in God himself, a lover and a beloved; therefore in God there must be the distinction of the persons. Therefore, as God reveals himself to us in this ineffable and infinite communion of love that goes from the Father to the Son, and from the Son to the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, so in the works *ad extra*, God did not want as much the unity of the whole of the human nature assumed by the Word, as the assumption of this human nature, because the Verb could then communicate himself with every created person. In other words, God wanted the covenant, has wanted this mystery of love by which he enters into a relationship with the man, and the man now enters into a relationship with God.

### **God wanted to say: "You are my Mother"**

I have repeatedly said that the greatest thing in the incarnation of the Word is not so much the incarnation in itself, but the fact that through this incarnation God had to say – think about it, he had to say!

Of course, because He has chosen this way to become a man – then he had to say to a girl of sixteen years, to a girl that no one knew: "You are my mother". And this girl could tell her God: "Thou art my son". That is, the eternal dialogue, and the infinite love that goes from the Father to the Son and from

the Son to the Father in the bosom of the divine Trinity, it now becomes the dialogue of a divine person with a person created, the Virgin. They are the same words. "You are my Son," says Father; "You are my son," says Maria. "You are my Father," says the divine Word to the first person of the Trinity; "Thou art my mother", says the Word incarnated in Mary.

It is the same thing, but we need to agree on it. All God in the Word is the relation of love to the Father; all God in the Father is the relation of love to the Verb. The Father in and for himself is not; it is all in the Son and through the Son. And he is in the Father and for the Father. Each divine person is pure, absolute and the infinite relation of love to the other person whom it is in correlation with.

It is also true, and this is a thing that is shaking heaven and earth, between the incarnated Word and the Virgin, between the Virgin and the Word incarnated.

Mary also is all for Jesus in such a way that Jesus is not the son of a mother and father, but of the mother only. As in his divine nature he is the son only of the Father, so in his human nature, he is the son of the mother only.

In his human nature he is totally dependent on her, because only by her he got to be a man. In his incarnation the Word is all relationship of love to the mother. For this reason, the person of the Virgin is associated in the most intimate, the most personal, the most total way to the divine Word made flesh. Not to the Word in his divine nature, but to the Word of God made man for us. And all for her. But it is also true that the Blessed Mary is in a whole relationship of love with her Son. This is so true that the Blessed Virgin Mary cannot be the mother but of only one son, as the Father is. Because, as the Father runs out the infinite fruitfulness of the divine being in the generation of the Word, so the Virgin runs out the fruitfulness of all creation in the generation of the Christ.

And as the Virgin is pure, total love relationship to the incarnated Word, so the incarnated Word is pure, as total

relationship of his self to the Virgin, his mother. All of this is well expressed by that patristic text that says: *Totius gratiae plenitudo, quae in Christo est, venit in Mariam, quamquam aliter.* All the grace that is in Christ is communicated to Mary. Not all of the grace that is in Christ because, as he is the son of God, the infinite holiness of God is incommunicable. Here we speak of the holiness of the divine Word as he becomes man, and all his holiness as head of the Church, the whole of which is communicated to the Virgin. Here it is because she can be the mother of the whole Church. We do not participate in the holiness of Mary. Not because she has an original holiness, because she herself receives that holiness from the Word divine, but because she receives it all. And all of us, therefore, live in the bosom of the Virgin, all of us live in the heart of Mary, we share in her holiness.

Then, the divine Word, in his assumed human nature, as the head the Church, is wholly given to the Virgin, it's all for her. And you understand why God, from eternity, wanted Christ before all else and the Virgin: because the Holy Virgin runs out in itself, all the mystery of God who communicates himself to the world. She really is the new creation of God, she truly is the one who, in herself, understands the universe.

### **The greatness of Mary**

This is a point we will have to deeply meditate for what those who do not believe blame on us is that there seems to be no proportion between what history wants to tell us and what theology really teaches us.

How is it possible to think that perhaps a sixteen-year-old girl, born in a township unknown to the same Jews; that little girl who did not have any human significance and who lived in darkness, should then be, according to what theology tells us, the Mother of God? She who in herself collects the whole grace? She who, as Mother of the whole Church, can communicate to each of us part of that grace that in her is

only full? How to unite these two things? The humility of her human condition, of her historical vicissitude, with the ineffable and almost infinite greatness of her holiness and her Dignity of Mother?

And here is the mystery of Christianity itself, my dear brothers. It may be here among us a person who is worth more than the whole universe for the Lord. There it may be; It depends on us since we believe in his love. Because in the end, the sanctity of every soul is nothing but God's holiness communicated to each one. And the measurement of the communication that God can do of himself to each one of us, is the faith that opens us to receive the divine gift. We cannot offer anything to God; we can only receive from Him. Our holiness is nothing but a participation into his holiness.

To God, we can only offer but our sins; he cannot receive anything else from us. Instead, all that is positive, we receive from him. We have nothing but this to give: our poverty, our indigence and unfortunately, even our sins. This he wants from us! But he wants us to give ourselves to him, In an act of absolute faith in his love, in order to welcome this infinite love of his, that has no other measure than our faith. The measure of the divine gift cannot be in God, for God is infinite. The measure of the gift of God lies in the faith we have in his love.

Mary's greatness is all here; there is no other greatness in the Madonna.

Saint Elisabeth proclaims it when Mary comes to her: "Blessed be thou that thou hast believed! ": All the greatness of Mary is in the faith for which she totally opens herself up to welcome God, even though she is a very poor daughter. Her greatness is the greatness of her faith. All of Mary's greatness is in this faith by which she totally abandons herself to the inconceivable and immense love of God.

Jesus and Mary associated from eternity. The Heavenly Father did not want Christ without wanting Mary; He wanted Christ for Mary and Mary for Christ, because he wanted the alliance. He wanted that the creature, the Human being, was associated with

God's very life and for this reason he had to become a man. However, even in becoming a man, no created person could have lived this communion of love; but in becoming man from a woman, in the same incarnation, he lives a love relationship. God is not relation with creation. Regardless of his will, absolutely free, God lives an infinite, eternal loneliness. His infinite transcendence in himself, requires the absolute solitude of God. No creature can violate this solitude. But God Himself wants to love us and for this he becomes a man and does it through a woman.

His incarnation already assumes a love relationship because he chooses a young girl to be born from her. And look, it's not just He who chooses this little girl, but this girl gives him all of her flesh and of her blood. Indeed, there is already a mutual relationship already in the incarnation. And this is the greatest mystery, mystery that then for us supposes the death on a cross. Also for Mary Most Holy it supposes the death of a cross, for she should also have suffered at least the original sin. As the *Ineffabilis Bolla* says, Maria is preserved by sin *intuitu meritorum Christi debitum* also for her: she too had to undergo the original sin and with it maybe even to other sins, like all of us. God has preserved her in view of the death of His Son on the cross; but he has preserved her from her conception, so that no sin ever could touch her. And in this she is different from us.

### **What difference between us and Mary?**

We, on the other hand, live the relationship with Christ, not so much for the incarnation of the Word, though this is a condition for there being a relationship between God and us. Our relationship of love with Christ has been established by him with his death on the cross. This explains why for us, he must take on our sins, while for Mary Most Holy he does not assume them.

Christ lives with her, already in the very act of his incarnation, one ineffable relationship of love. For us,

instead, Christ had to assume not our human nature only, but also our sins. And by assuming the responsibility of our sins, He has become the one who as a friend, as a bridegroom, has given us his Blood, has given us his life, and has given us his holiness. But with Mary Most Holy, it is from the very first moment of the Incarnation of the Word that a real and personal relationship was established between the second person of the Most Holy Trinity and a created person, a little girl: and between a little girl and the Word of God. Then, if the mystery of the association of Christ to the Virgin and the Virgin to Christ concludes and embraces all the mystery of the economy of salvation, all the mystery for which God has worked outside of himself, it comes from it that Mary is the beginning, the centre, and the end of all the story of salvation.

And in the beginning, because God wanted her with Christ since eternity. This the pope said in the Bolla by which he proclaimed her Immaculate Conception. The pope says that God wanted Mary and Christ with an act which precedes any of his designs in the world.

Mary is at the centre, because at the centre of all there is the incarnation of the Word; and without Mary this incarnation is not there. God chose to become a man assuming human nature from her; and she gave it to him. It's not like Adam. Adam was created directly by God, but Jesus did not. Jesus is Son of Mary. It is only because of her that he is a man; only because of her! No other creature is involved. Only because of the Virgin!

Mary is at the end of all the Christian mystery because, like the thought of God from eternity embraces all creation to make it part of his holiness, so the assumption of Mary and her glorification are the sure promise, the real anticipation of what will be the Glorification of all creation.

Why does Christ resurrect?

What role, then, is the resurrection of Jesus? It is the glorification of the human nature of the Divine Word. It was impossible that the Divine Word should not be glorified. It

was almost inconceivable that God could assume the human nature, and that it would not immediately be glorified. How is it possible that God could take human nature and this human nature should know hunger, fatigue, pain, insult, death? For us this is the supreme mystery.

It is explained by the fact that there is sin, and Jesus since His birth assumes a human nature, that because of sin is subject to death, for he wants to be the Savior of it. But in itself the assumption of the human nature implied necessarily and in the most absolute way the glorification of this nature. In fact, it's never There is indeed a mutual relationship already in the incarnation. And this is the greatest mystery, mystery that then for us supposes the death on a cross. Also for Mary Most Holy it supposes the death of a cross, for she should also have suffered at least the original sin. As the *Ineffabilis Bolla* says, Maria is preserved by *sin intuitu meritorum Christi debitum* also for her: she too had to undergo original sin and with it maybe even to other sins, like all of us. God has preserved her in view of the death on the cross of his Son; but he has preserved her from her conception, so that no sin ever could touch her. And in this she is different from us.

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Most Holy Mary is instead a human person like me; therefore Mary's glorification is truly a promise and an anticipation of a glorification that invests us all. As her holiness implies our holiness, because ours is a participation of her holiness, so her glorification anticipates and gives me the sure hope of a future glorification of mine. It is true that I am a poor man because I am a created person but Mary's glorification is the sure promise of my glorification.

**In Jesus it is God who communicates himself; in Mary it is God who communicated himself.**

So Mary is at the beginning, the centre, and the end of all things. Not regardless of the Word, because from the eternity God has always wanted to associate the divine Word with the Virgin. The Word as a source before all the supernatural life; Mary, like the one who received from him all this life. In Jesus it is God who communicates himself; In Mary it is God who communicated himself.

Then we can understand the truth in the words of Saint Andrew

of Crete, the one who among all the Fathers of the Church has most glorified Mary.

He states: "After God you are God"; A second god! And it is true, like It is true that we all must become God by grace. The Virgin is not God by nature, but in the incarnate Word, God gives everything of himself to the Virgin and the Virgin welcomes him completely as his son. So she truly is God after God, as Saint Andrew of Crete says. That is why the Patristic (theology) can say that she is a second God: not God by nature, but God communicated. God who communicates to himself is the Christ, God communicated is the Virgin. Now we, being people, are the ones who need to welcome the gift of God.

Reality is a sign of mystery.

How can we overcome the scandal (which for many who have no faith constitutes an unsurpassed obstacle) of such poor signs on the visible level of what, on the contrary, on the theological level has a scope of an immense magnitude? For us Catholics, the thing is very simple and clear. We believe that under the species of bread and wine, there is the Son of God; yet is there a more disappointing sign of these species into which we believe is present the one who is immense, the one who is infinite? If we can believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharistic mystery, we can also believe that all that is visible is nothing but a sign of an immense mystery overwhelming it. This is not true only for Our Lady, it is also true for Jesus. Think of the death of Jesus: all humanity that has lived since perhaps 600,000 years, depends on this death! The salvation of every man as that of all people and of all creation, even the elevation of angels to the supernatural state, according to most theologians, depends on this man whom we know very little about on the historical level. About him we know only that he was crucified and died in Jerusalem; because all that the gospels tell us is true, but from the gospels we cannot rebuild Jesus' life in its true sense. About all of his existence, before the beginning of public life, we are told only some pieces, but so divided among them that we cannot reconstruct the story of his

childhood, his youth and even his own mature age until he starts the public life. With two words the evangelist solves it: *Et erat subditus illis*, and was subject to them.

Of our Lord we know very little about his human life down here. So the history of Christ, and even more the story of Mary, looks like something insignificant, as well as insignificant is the kind of bread if we want to proportion the sign to the meant reality.

Let us remember a fundamental law of religious life: as God is infinite, the sign makes him as much more present as it almost disappears. And the opposite, the more the sign is expressive, the less God is made known. We see it in the cosmic revelation, where God's sign is all creation. Also today most of men live a religious life more in relation to the creation than in relationship with Jesus and the Church. The immensity of the sea, the majesty of the mountains fill us with amazement. This is so true, and the thing is to demonstrate how our faith has diminished, that even the small holy pictures, those little pictures that can be found in stores dealing with religious items, mainly depict mountains, seas or natural phenomena.

And do you know why? Because God today is felt more through the creation that not through the higher revelations of God himself. Creation gives the sense of the immensity of God, but does it tell you that God loves you? When you see a river, do you have the perception that there is a God who loves you? So if you contemplate the immensity of the sea, do you think there is a God who loves you? No.

Because it is not yet a personal God that the cosmic revelation gives us.

### **Christianity is a personal relationship with God.**

When God becomes personal, he becomes involved with man: with Abraham, with the Jewish people. But this too is not a fully personal relationship; It is the relationship **with** God that creates the history of a people. It is only on the eve of Christianity that the prayer in Judaism becomes a personal

prayer. But even then it is not a prayer that implies a full personal relationship of God with man. Christianity stays in this: God loves me! For me he is dead! *Dilexit me et tradidit semetipsum pro me*. Therefore, for God, I am worth more than the whole universe; I am more for God than the whole creation; He loves me!

If God's love is a personal love, it implies that God commands himself to each of us; and because he is infinite he cannot love me by part, because God has no parts, being simple.

Therefore He loves me with all of himself; each one of us is an object of his infinite love. Each of us! Here it is Christianity. The sign is very poor, it is Jesus. And after him, there will be the Eucharistic species.

It is me, poor man as I am, the sign of this immense love. And yet what does God do by loving us? Did he make me maybe younger? No. Because I'm aging the same, even though God loves me. God loves me and I can have sore throat, I can get a cold. God leaves us in our nothingness. There seems to be no proof of this infinite love that he brings us. For this reason, many times men rebel: "God is not fair because he let my husband die," "Because he let my wife die".

We rebel because we want to proportion God's love to human, historical things, while on this level God is like absent.

The faith we must have in him absolutely transcends all the manifestations that he can give us of himself. Do you believe that maybe God loves me less than he loves the pope? God loves all with his eternal love. The measure depends on the faith I have in his love, the faith that the pope has in his love. It all depends on this faith, because the measure of God's love is not in God who loves us, as I told you at first, but it is in us who open ourselves up to welcome this love.

That is why the most difficult thing for us Christians is not so much the exercise of virtues. Virtues are also exercised in the other religions. If you know Buddhist ethics, you cannot deny that those are great and noble moral principles. If you know stoicism, you cannot deny the nobility of those ethical

principles, even of pagans as Seneca and Epictetus. This is so true that we wanted to make of Seneca almost a Christian, so noble it is all that he teaches. But what is lacking in these people is faith, that faith that opens the creature to welcome God. As long as we exercise virtues, virtues which are part of human morality because, even independently of faith, one must be honest and honest. It will be harder to be honest and righteous, but we must be the same. Morality is part of human nature as such. But it is in the faith that we open ourselves to welcome God. Let us be understood! Faith is not enough; But with faith, if we live God's love, we will have the virtues that are the natural consequence of having welcomed God in us because the Gospel says that "One only is good, God". But God lives in each one of us. Therefore, we must participate in the goodness of God, but we participate in it to the extent that we welcome God into us and God lives in us his same life.

### **Mary, sign of God**

Then, what relationship is there between what theology says about Mary and the story of this humble woman we know so little about? About this woman who is living in the biggest hideout? That did not have any importance I do not say for Judaism, but not even for her native country? What is the relationship? There is connection of the sign with the meant reality.

The reality meant in Mary was God Himself because, in her faith, she had welcomed him. From this, we can understand why the High Pontiff in the encyclical on Our Lady, which is an encyclical among the most beautiful that the pope has written, insists so much on Mary's; because Mary's greatness is equal to the faith she has had in God. It is the faith that opens us to accept his omnipotence: it is the faith that opens us to welcome especially his love.

With this first meditation we wanted to focus on what Our Lady is, and we have said: Our Lady is in the divine plan she who summarizes the whole mystery of the economy, that is, all that God accomplished outside of himself. Our Lady fulfills

everything in herself; not without Christ, because without Christ Madonna is nothing but Madonna with Christ, Christ and Our Lady. So Pope Pius IX's words in the *Ineffabilis Bolla* are completely true. Not only with what regards God's greatest intention: as the first pope says, He longed from eternity Christ and the Virgin. But what He wanted from eternity was accomplished in time and the whole story is summed up in the Incarnation of the Word, in which Christ and the Virgin are associated in the most intimate way: neither Jesus without Mary, or Mary without Jesus.

**Center of all the mystery of the economy.**

But Maria is also in the end, because even in the end I cannot think of Jesus alone. As I cannot think of Jesus alone because of his incarnation, so I cannot think of Jesus alone, in his final glorification, because the glorification of our Lord is necessary; It is not a free fact, it is not a gratuitous fact. He must be glorified because he is God. It is true that he has assumed a human nature exposed to suffering because he has become one with all sinners though, like God, he could not be left without glorification. And indeed it is a great mystery the fact that this glorification was postponed at the end of his life. The moment in which he assumed human nature, this human nature had to be glorified and deified. It is what happens to us when we are totally liberated from any imperfection, we will be immediately transformed into God. Even before death, according to St. John of the Cross; not in my opinion because once identified with Christ, much more than we must still live for the redemption of the world. We cannot dissociate ourselves from the whole creation. It is the teaching that gave us Santa Teresa of the Child Jesus correcting St. John of the Cross. For St. John of the Cross once the soul is purified, it immediately goes to heaven in a blessed ecstasy. No, Santa Teresa of the Child Jesus says; I want to die like Jesus in Of our Lord we know very little about his human life down here. So the history of Christ and the more the story of Mary, looks

like something insignificant, as well as insignificant is the kind of bread if we want to proportion the sign to the reality meant.

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be upright and honest. It will be harder to be honest and righteous, but we must be the same. Morality is part of human nature as such. But it is in the faith that we open ourselves to welcome God. Let us be understood! Faith is not enough; But with faith, if we live God's love, we will have the virtues that are the natural consequence of having welcomed God in us because the Gospel says that "One alone is good, God". But God lives in each one of us. Therefore, we must participate in the goodness of God, but we participate in it to the extent that we welcome God into us and God lives in us his same life.

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Then what relationship is there between what theology says about Mary and the story of this humble woman we know so little about? About this woman who is living in the biggest hideout? That did not have any importance I do not say for Judaism, but not even for her native country? What is the relationship? There is ratio of the sign with the meant reality.

The reality meant in Mary was God Himself because, in her faith, she had welcomed him. From this, we can understand why the High Pontiff in the encyclical on Our Lady, which is an encyclical among the most beautiful that the pope has written, insists so much on Mary's faith; because Mary's greatness is equal to the faith she has had in God. It is the faith that opens us to accept his omnipotence: it is the faith that opens us to welcome especially his love.

With this first meditation we wanted to focus on what Our Lady is, and we have said: Our Lady is in the divine plan she who summarizes the whole mystery of the economy, that is, all that God accomplished outside of himself. Our Lady all that fulfills in herself; not without Christ, because without Christ the Madonna is nothing but the Madonna with Christ, Christ and Our Lady. So Pope Pius IX's words in the *Ineffabilis Bolla* are completely true. Not only with what regards God's greatest intention: as first thing, the pope says, he longed from eternity Christ and the Virgin. But what

he wanted from eternity was accomplished in time and the whole story is summed up in the Incarnation of the Word, in which Christ and the Virgin are associated in the most intimate way: neither Jesus without Mary, or Mary without Jesus.

**Center of all the mystery of the economy.**

But Maria is also in the end, because even in the end I cannot think of Jesus alone. As I cannot think of Jesus alone because of his incarnation, so I cannot think of Jesus alone, in his final glorification, because the glorification of our Lord is necessary; It is not a free fact, it is not a gratuitous fact. He must be glorified because he is God. It is true that he has assumed a human nature exposed to suffering because he has become one with all sinners though, like God, he could not be left without glorification. And indeed it is a great mystery the fact that this glorification was postponed at the end of his life. In the moment in which he assumed human nature, this human nature had to be glorified and divinized. It is what happens to us when we are totally liberated from any imperfection, we will be immediately transformed into God. Even before death, according to St. John of the Cross; not in my opinion, because once identified with Christ, much more than we must still live for the redemption of the world. We cannot dissociate ourselves from the whole creation. It is the teaching that gave us Santa Teresa of the Child Jesus correcting St. John of the Cross. For St. John of the Cross once the soul is purified, it immediately goes to heaven in a blessed ecstasy. No, Santa Teresa of the Child Jesus says; I want to die like Jesus in desolation and abandonment. Why? Because she wants to be the board to which sinners cling to be saved. This is one of the fundamental themes of the spirituality of St. Teresa. We cannot dissociate ourselves from our brothers. The more we will be Saints, the more we will have to resemble Jesus who freely, gratis, wanted to take on the weight of the whole universal sin and bring it over the cross to redeem the world. So we should do too.

But in itself, once we are free from all sin, like Jesus, we too should be glorified right away. Instead our glorification is postponed, but, however, it has a sure promise, a real anticipation in the Assumption of Mary.

### **The three Great Celebrations of Our Lady.**

And here are the three great celebrations of Our Lady, all of three of obligations: the Immaculate Conception, the Motherhood of Mary and the Assumption. Why do we celebrate the Immaculate Conception in the advent season, at the beginning of the liturgical year? Because it is the first thing God wanted.

The advent begins with the will of God to associate the Virgin and Christ. Why then is Mary's Motherhood celebrated with Christmas? Because it's impossible to celebrate Christmas without thinking of the Virgin Mary. Jesus cannot be born unless he does not originate from Our Lady. And why at the end of the liturgical year, after all the celebrations that contemplate God's salvific events, why after Pentecost, there is the Assumption of Mary?

Because it is the end of everything. Assumption that anticipates and it is the promise of the glorification of us all in Mary and with Mary.

Here is, then, who the Madonna is. Then we understand how we cannot deny anything to the Virgin without compromising the Christian mystery. In fact, it is the mystery of a God who communicates himself to the world and who is all welcomed by the pure Virgin. That is why I cannot think of Christ without her; and I cannot think of her without Christ. No one is so associated with the Word as Mary; and no one is associated with Mary as Christ.

### **"... by the work of the Holy Spirit"**

We said at the beginning: as the Father is totally, eternally, and infinitely in a love relationship with the Son, so the Son is to the Father.

And it must be equally said: as in the incarnate Word

everything is conform to man, so in Mary, the whole man tends to conform himself to Christ. It repeats itself in the mystery of the economy, in the mystery of the creation, what is the mystery of God's intimate life. As in God's intimate life the relationship of the Father to the Son and the Son with the Father is consumed in the unity of the Holy Spirit, so it is consumed the union of Christ with the Virgin and of the Virgin to Christ in the Holy Spirit: "the Spirit of the Lord will descend upon you".

It is the Holy Spirit who inevitably unites Mary to Jesus because Mary becomes the Mother of Christ through the Holy Spirit. And it is for the Holy Spirit that the Son of God communicates to the world, because he communicates in that act of love by which he gives himself as a gift.

Analogously the Christian mystery repeats the mystery of the Trinity, with the difference that in Trinity everything is necessary, essential, eternal; while everything is free in the mystery of the economy, that is, of God's extra work.

The total reference to Christ is just a created person: the pure Virgin. That is why *totius gratiae quae in Christo est plenitudo venit in Mariam, quamquam aliter*. The fullness of the grace that is in Christ, everything came to Mary, but in a different way, because in Christ there is as the source, while in Mary there is like a lake that collects all the waters of grace.

Here it is what the Holy Virgin is. We will never overdo her size. It is a totally free size, which depends on the love of God; but it is a real size. She really is greater than all of creation. The creation itself is a sign of her, of her who is the new creation God lives in. If we are in a state of grace, God who is infinite, abides in our hearts. And if he is there, there can also stay the whole creation!

### **The greatness of man**

Here is the power of man! Small thing in himself, man is created for being larger than the whole creation. Today we are part of this creation. On the physical level we are nothing,

but on the real level each of us may be wider than a continent. If the Virgin is Mother of the whole Church, this means that all men live of her own grace; from her they receive that grace that originates in God and of which she, in dependence from Christ, is the mediator. So, she embraces all humanity, indeed all creation. If in fact it is through the incarnation, as many Fathers teach, that even the angels have been raised to the supernatural life, even the angelic world she embraces in her mediation, in dependence from Christ. She is not part of the creation; it is the creation that is part of her!

This is also true for each one of us according to the measure of our faith. Each of us in the measure of our faith is wider than the sea, higher than the mountains, reaches the sky and can open himself so much to embrace the whole earth. The charity that God communicates to us, in itself, has no limit but that of the faith in which we welcome this charity that is widespread in our hearts because of the Holy Ghost that has been given us, as Saint Paul says in the Letter to the Romans. And here's why for us, poor creatures as we are, it is true that, loved by God in the measure with which we welcome this divine love, we already live the salvation. What is salvation? It is a liberation, is the overcoming of the many conditionings of the human nature. If we live only in time, we are bound to disappear. In fifty years who will ever remember me? It's as if I've never been born. But if I'm loved by God, I touch eternity; time has no capacity to destroy me. I emerge from time and touch eternity.

And equally: what am I in this world? I'm nothing even in Italy; let alone in the world! And what am I in the whole creation? But if I touch God, if in faith I live a real relationship with God, I live the very immensity of God. Creation is a whatsoever thing with regard to my greatness, for salvation of the Christian is a participation in God's own life that we ourselves communicate through the Incarnate Word. But to us it is given in the measure of a faith which in us is always poor, which in us is always miserable, even when we

have it. In the Virgin, however, it is a faith which did not know any other limit than what may have an human act, because she remains a human creature. Therefore Mary's holiness is not an infinite holiness, but it can be said, with Saint'Andrea of Crete, that it is almost infinite because it has no other limit than the same possibility of our very nature of being taken by God, to be *Capax Dei*, able to welcome God himself. Hence our astonishment comes from it, but also our joy to know that our sister has been raised to such great a dignity, and that she has been glorified by God with such an immense glorification. What a wonderful thing Christianity is, always!

### **Sequela Christi**

In Mary alone, we contemplate the work of God. In the Incarnation of the Word we see a God who becomes a man, but God was also before. He did not add anything to his divinity by the fact that he became incarnate; but the incarnation becomes a condition for each of us to rise up to him. In fact, through the incarnation God does not come into contact only with Mary, but also with us. And here it is the *sequela Christi*.

I can be the disciple of Jesus, I can be his companion and his brother, I can be his friend: I can be his bride!

There is a novice here who is called to be the bride of the Word.

What is the whole world history in comparison with what she will have to live? Nonsense! Bride! What does bride mean? It means that the bridegroom orders himself the bride, because marriage demands the reciprocal gift of one to the other. Well, that little girl will give our Lord her poverty, her helplessness; and our Lord will give her everything He is. Through the incarnation we also live this relationship, and it is in this relationship that consists the Christian life. Let us realize that virtues in themselves are not Christian life. There is not a Christian life without virtues, let us understand it well; but the virtues are only one natural

effect of our relationship with Christ and the relationship of Christ with us. First of all, what is essential is the fact that God loves me and I love him; it is the fact that we enter into a live relationship with the Incarnate Word. This relationship will never be like that of the Virgin with Jesus, but it will always be a participation to that relationship. We will talk about the Immaculate Conception of Mary during Mass, but first it was good to give this overall and synthetic vision of the greatness of Mary. Because so many times it is thought of her as a part; but she is not part! None of us is part. But even if for example we are the whole Church, we are, but not *totaliter*. We are according to the measure of our faith; and it is always very little thing our faith. But it remains the fact that we cannot be a part because we are an absolute, because God commands himself to each one of us! As if I were just alone in front of his love! I realize this absolute greatness to the extent that I live my relationship with God. That is why, while in the Old Testament there is a history of the Jewish people, in Christianity in the history of the Church there is not a sacred story. What it is sacred instead, is the life of each of us. And here are the saints, that many times on the human level have led a life of extreme poverty, like so many poor sisters lived in the shadow: but God loved them and they loved God.

This teaches us the Virgin "I am the Immaculate Conception". In this holy Mass, which is celebrated in honour of the Holy Virgin, we must try to meditate on what the mystery of her immaculate conception is.

Already Maximilian Maria Kolbe had tried to find out why Mary Most Holy had given herself that name, when she replied to Santa Bernadette who asked her about it at the request of her pastor. There indeed, the Virgin's response was rather odd. God alone can say: I am the truth, I am wisdom. He alone can say of himself, in an absolute sense, that he has that attribute. That is why the parish priest of Santa Bernadette was disconcerted when he heard that the name he had asked for was "Immaculate Conception". Mary Most Holy could have said,



in a participatory sense, that she was conceived immaculate; therefore conceived and not conception.

Saint Maximilian Kolbe related this name provided by the Virgin to the name God gives himself: I am the truth; I am Love. And Our Lady is the Immaculate Conception. This is to say, that Our Lady speaks about herself in an absolute sense; but she speaks about herself as a creature, because if it is conceived, this means that she is a creature.

What do these words mean? That Most Holy Mary is the creature such as God would have wanted her, and that God did in her his ultimate perfection. Now, a creature made in her ultimate perfection is pure ability to welcome God. Nothing else. Maria is therefore, pure transparency. Her Immaculate Conception then wants to say that her creation, from nowhere became a capacity welcoming the infinite holiness of God, which gathered in itself all of the splendour and the light of divine being.

### **In what sense is Our Lady God?**

We closed the previous meditation by saying that we could accept the words of Saint Andrew of Crete by which he proclaims that Our Lady, after God, is God Himself, or *Bride of the Trinity*.<sup>1</sup> Now these words have to be better justified by talking about the **Immaculate Conception of the Virgin**.

What did God want when he wanted creation? May God want something else than His infinitude? No, and for that, when he wanted the creation, he wanted himself infinite. But could creation be him? Yes, it could be because what God is by necessity of nature, God himself, for free gratuity of love, he wanted his creation to be him. And in fact this is what

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1 In a hymn in honor of Theotòkos, which lies among the spurious works of Epiphanius of Salamina († 403) and which the authors attribute to Germano, Patriarch of Constantinople from 715 to 730, or to an anonymous one at the same time, Mary is called "Bride of the Trinity"

Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Gregory of Nissa, Saint Hippolyte teach us, and which Saint Maximus the confessor, as well as Saint John of the Cross will repeat: man must become God by grace, must become God by participation of love. This is the reason of his being.

These words seem blasphemies, considering how great and disproportionate they are to our poverty, but they want to say that we are a pure opportunity that opens itself up to welcome God. If God gives himself to us, we must be an abyss capable of accepting infinity.

Remember the words the Heavenly Father told Saint Catherine of Siena in the *Dialogue of Divine Providence*? "As I am infinite in acting , "says God the Father to the saint," so you, being a creature, are infinite in desiring. "God has created us as pure capacity to welcome him. We are like a nothing that opens to welcome infinity in itself.

Saint Therese of Avila is not usually a great poetess, also because she wrote her poems only for the recreation of her nuns. But she wrote a really wonderful one where she manifests her amazement at the fact that God can unite himself to nothingness, and that nothingness can welcome the infinity of God. "You tie what is not," she says, "with what is." How can we tie together what is with what is not? Yet the creature is this: the real possibility of being God.

This is what the Lord has done for us!

We are no more than this real possibility of being God: but to **become** God by grace, our soul needs to live the deepest humility of a created being. She has to know, hear and live only depending on God. The being of the creature is never an autonomous being. In itself and for itself the creature is not. She is in God and for God, and in him and for him she is what God wants it to be. Because we have said that God cannot want anything other than himself, the creature will therefore have a capacity that welcomes God and transforms itself into God himself becoming God by grace.

Who has realized this ineffable mystery, this extraordinary vocation of divine love? One creature, the Virgin. Just for

this reason she is *the whole saint*, because no sin ever has touched her: no limit, which every sense of property implies, she has opposed to the gift of God.

### **The pride of man**

The most serious sin is to believe ourselves autonomous towards God. It's going against God who is our Creator. Pretending to be independent of God is not a blasphemy; it's stupid because we are creatures. Without God we are not; if we are, we are in God. Being itself is participated to us. We are not, but we have the being, that is, we receive it. In itself and for itself the creature is not; It is in God and for God. It is in the very logic of sin that man affirms himself. Instead, the saints, the Christian mystics, for example, have only a desire, a hunger, a will: to disappear, to die for themselves. The path of the soul to God, for us who have gone away from him, is the path of humility. It is not about climbing Mount Carmel, nor about climbing the stairs of paradise, but it is about going down into the deepest abyss of nothingness. Only nothingness can welcome God who is all. To the extent that you are, God is not, the saints teach us; to the extent that God is, you are not. And in fact, regardless of God we are not. "The creation and God," says St. John of the Cross, "is God. "He cannot sum the creature to God, otherwise God would not be any more the one, God would no longer be One. He is alone: *Vidite quod ego sim solus*, ponder how I am alone, the only one. Unity and uniqueness of God. The only creature that can perfectly proclaim the unity of God is the Virgin, because she lives in an abyss of bottomless humility. She does not appropriate anything. Not only has she not sinned, but she has not even had those imperfections that depend on the fact that the creature can feel itself autonomous. She lives in this nothingness and can accommodate all the glory of heaven, all the infinite holiness of God.

Here it is the Immaculate Conception of Mary!  
 I told you that conception implies creation. And that's what distinguishes Our Lady from God: the fact that she was not and is now. But she is even God for the participation of love, because she puts no limit to the divine will. And divine will is God Himself, because God cannot want but himself.

### **The Way of Holiness**

Christian mystics teach us this too.

There is a path in the spiritual life that implies various degrees. Before anything else there is obedience to the law, there are the commandments of God; but it seems to us that this obedience is to a law that is foreign to us. Indeed it was written on stone plates. God looks like a master: "I am the Lord, your God." Mind you! So the commandments of God begin. God, if he is a creator, is not alien to you, but more intimate to you than yourself. What is the law of the Christian? It is the Holy Spirit who lives in our heart. There are no more stone tables; there are no longer the commandments of God according to Saul and also according to San Thomas Aquinas, for the law of the Christian is the Holy Spirit who lives in him. Of course, if we go against the commandments of God, it means that the Holy Spirit does not live in us; but these commandments are not imposed on us from outside, because God already lives in our hearts. To the obedience, it then takes over the docility of the son who lives the very will of the father and lives it for love.

But that's not enough. The ultimate goal is the total abandonment of the self to the power of God, it is the renunciation of every one's own will so that in us may only live the divine will.

What then does the soul live when truly wants to be holy? Its death because it is only in the self-annihilation that God is made known in the heart of man. All the path of perfection consists in this annihilation of self. If you read the *Brief*

*Compendium of the Perfection* written by Achille Gagliardi, one of the most important authors of the Italian mysticism, it is in the self-annihilation that is the path of perfection. And this is what San Paolo of the Cross tells us too, what St. John of the Cross repeats and with them all the saints. The man must disappear in order that in him God alone may be present, He who is the only one.

Then, is the creature not? No, she is because she agrees with God, but it is the very creature herself to consent to him! In fact, man cannot even open himself up; and there is the sin. You cannot agree to this divine presence who everything erases in its infinite light: we cannot agree or consent in an ill way.

It is then that you set a limit to this divine presence. But in the Virgin, who wants nothing but God alone, he dominates as a king. In her God is really the only one, just like we proclaim Him.

### **To become pure reflection of God.**

We proclaim it, but only in words. Saying the Shema' every day, like we do, would mean to be really God, because God alone can say to be the One. If you're there too, then you're in two! It is the same teaching that the Muslims also give to the *taqlid*: "God is God and Muhammad is his prophet. "What does Muhammad do there? If God is God, it is enough! Mohammed is something more. And it is the same for you if you say, "Listen, Israel, the Lord is your God, the Lord is One. "If the Lord is One, you are not. You are, but in him; You are, but for him. And if you are in him and for him, then you are the One who gives himself to you. In fact, he has created you as a nothing that can accommodate the infinite.

Here is what creation is, what is the vocation of a man. But this is not true for us, because we cannot say to be the Immaculate Conception. With the very fact of being creatures, we have already contracted sin, that sin which somehow separated us from God. It is a psychological separation and not an ontological one. In fact, if it were ontological we

would not be, there it would be the real annihilation of anything being created. But the psychological annihilation occurred; that annihilation that implies for us to be pure capacity to welcome the Lord.

When we speak of the Virgin, we do not see the Virgin. When I look at a pure crystal, I do not see the crystal, but I see through the crystal what the crystal itself makes me see. If I put it facing a wall, I'll see the wall. And if this crystal is the crystal of a soul, we no longer see the soul, we see only God.

Even in the ancient mystics, in Evagrius, for example, the vision of God is a specular vision: the soul sees God reflected in his soul.

We are like the mirror that reflects the face of God. If we are free from all stains, then God will be reflected in us in his purity, in his indefiniteness, in his holiness. But we are born into sin, we said, and we have committed other current sins. All this will always prevent, more or less, a holiness like that of the Virgin, because the sin, though forgiven, leaves as a relic a feeling of ownership, leaves as a relic the inability to live this original nothingness that is of the creature.

What then should we do if we wanted to live by a certain imitation of the Virgin? We must descend into the depths of nothingness.

The ancient Church Fathers<sup>2</sup> used to say that Christian life begins when you put yourself under the feet of all, when you feel yourself the most sinner of all, and when you will go down to the deepest abyss. And it was this, if you remember, the suffering of Charles de Foucauld: God has fallen so deeply, that I will never go down as deep as he does. Sure, because he was God; but this is true also for Our Lady and it is true even for our Lord as a creature, since he assumed his human nature.

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2 St. Agustinus, Confessiones, III, 6,11.

### **Living the divine presence that erases us.**

God has been able to assume human nature precisely because it is such that reserves nothing for itself. For in Jesus there is no human person, there is no human "I", but only God lives in him. In the Virgin it is not the person of the Word that exists but a person created; a created person who lives only the contemplation of this divine Presence, she only lives this opening to welcome God.

Other times I told you that for me the only reason for Mary's disturbance when she was greeted by the angel is the fact of being greeted.

So did she exist? Called, she emerges from the abyss of this silence, from the abyss of this humility in which she continually lives in the contemplation of the Lord.

On the contrary, we can divert our attention even in church! And sometimes even while making communion! What abyss of misery we are! God seems to us far away, while not only he is close, but he is the same presence inside us, more intimate than ourselves.

And we feel that paradise is here, in this place, at this moment in which we live? If we do not feel it, it means that there is still in us the impurity which we still must free ourselves from.

He is! And it's not but him! He is God! We are only in so far as in him and Kairòs: God did not want the incarnation for himself, but for us therefore we should not live anything but that divine presence that wipes us out.

How many times I told you: could you ever count the stars, at noon, in August, in full sunlight? The sunlight erases every other light; so the divine presence clears for us each other thought, every other desire, every other aspiration, every memory. Only God is left.

This is the Virgin Mary. I do not see her as Virgin, I do see only God in her. I do not take anything from God in celebrating the Virgin, because she has nothing left to herself. Mary is like a pure Crystal through which every

praise, every love comes to his Son, it comes to God. So, it seems to me really unintelligent to pretend that what we give to the Virgin is subtracted from the Lord. Indeed, going through Our Lady is the best means to bring our praise to God. We can hold something, but she does not hold much of what we donate to her.

Everything goes to that God who, alone, lives in her soul. Here is what is the Immaculate Conception of Mary: condition of this infinite purity that was all her life, condition of this deification, we use this term because the Fathers used it, which is unique in her and for which she, after Christ, is the greatest revelation we have of God. There is no goodness in her that is her own, but the holiness of God all shines in her. There is no goodness in her that is her own, but the goodness of God is in her in its fullness. She does not live in her, but only the Lord does. Here is what the Conception of the Immaculate Mary is all about.

This is the way the Holy Virgin opens for you that today make your consecration or do a profession of vows. It is a way of purification in such a way that you truly become a mirror of God's holiness.

*Speculum justitiae* is the Virgin; the mirror of God 's holiness is the pure Virgin; and you too must be such! Have you too not been created in the image and likeness of God? This picture was veiled by so many imperfections, it has been covered by so many infidelities. Free your soul from every scratch, clean it from every stain and the light of God, all the glory of his holiness, may shine in you.

And this is the path of Christian holiness for all of us. But you do not trust yourself because if you did, this would already take you away. It is a presumption to think that you can do something on your own on the supernatural level. Let yourself be carried to him! Let yourself be possessed by him! Let us get purified by the Holy Spirit.

And note it well: we cannot be God if God does not transform us in himself. God, as it has always been said, is infinitely poor; he has not, but he is. Therefore, if we want to be God,



it is necessary that he transforms us in himself. For him to possess us, we must be God, to become him by grace. Let the Lord do this miracle and make us holy.

Let us pray for each other so that the mystery of this transformation into God, in a total purity, may come into realization in all of us.

Cassiano, the greatest master of Western spirituality up to St. Thomas, said that *puritas cordis* identifies itself with agape.

In the measure, that you purify yourself from all sins, to the same extent you shine of all the holiness of God in love.

Agape is divine life, it is love. You become love to the extent that you free yourself from any attachment, from all selfishness, from every tie to yourself.

*Fiat voluntas tua*: we say it every day. That we may really do his will! The will of God is God himself. God cannot want anything other than himself, as I said before.

Many times we say that it is God's will *to sweep the stairs* or *to be general assistant*: that's not true! The will of God is God<sup>3</sup>. It is true, then, that this being God is then incarnated in the being San Sergio rather than in the house of the Canossians; or this being is then incarnated in the house of the Canossian than in Indonesia instead. It embodies all these things, but remember that through these things we all have to live only God, we must be the sacrament of His presence of love.

May the Lord accomplish all this in us!

### **Mary is all that the Bible teaches us**

The hymn of Acathistos <sup>4</sup>, which we have recited, dates back to the eighth century and it was written by Romano the Melode,

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3 1*Tessalonians* 4, 3.

4 <http://www.orthodoxchristian.info/pages/Akathist.htm>

which perhaps is the greatest lyric writer that the Church had. It would be important to study it, as it would also be important to study the homilies of Saint Andrew of Crete. A teaching comes from this hymn, as from those homilies: Mary is the interpretation of the whole Bible, Mary is all that the Bible teaches us.

You felt how in the hymn, there is a reference to the temple to tell us that Mary is holier than the greatest of the saints, holier than **the propitiatory**<sup>5</sup>; She is the wagon that brings God to the earth, she is larger than the cherubic **reference**<sup>6</sup>, brighter than the seraphic **sign**<sup>7</sup>. She is the one for whom Pharaoh

Is submerged by the waters; She is the new paradise of God. Here are the first chapters of Genesis which are made in Mary. Then what does all the ancient patristic (theology) teach us about the Virgin? That she is, as the Word of God, the interpretation and the fulfillment of all the themes of the Scripture. I told you in the first meditation, that Mary Most Holy is greater than the whole universe, because she embraces it: not on the level of a phenomenal reality, but on the eschatological one. And what is true in regard to the creation, it is true also in regard to the whole Bible. What is the Bible? It is the announcement, the promise, the prophecy of what God would accomplish with the Incarnation of the Word for the redemption of the world. Well, if the Bible is this promise, if the Bible is this announcement, they are fulfilled in the Incarnated Word and in Mary most holy.

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5 Propitiatory = the rectangular gold plate engraved on the lid of the ancient arch of the Jewish alliance, which during the sacrifices was sprayed with the blood of the victims.

6 Reference = the shining light of God's holiness made a living sign in the Cherubim angel.

7 Sign = the ardor of the flame of God's love that makes a living sign in the Seraphim.

Then there is nothing greater **in** Mary too.

We Westerners are more rationalistic than the Orientals and we want an accurate philosophical exegesis that sometimes blemishes the Bible of its depth and its true breadth. But for these ancient Fathers, for the whole Church of the Orient, Akathistos is indeed a song that is part of the Eastern liturgy, the whole Bible has only one explanation and it is Christ. And as the whole Bible has an explanation in Christ so, also, the whole bible has an explanation and it is Mary. As Maria and Christ are intimately and deeply associated with each other in the fulfillment of the divine design, so Mary and Christ are finally, the last boundary of the entire Bible. And they are also explanation, clarification of what the Bible contains in itself of secrecy, in its prophetic announcement, and of his divine promise.

Here it is what the Akathistos can teach us. You could be bored by all those repetitions, but which wealth don't they suppose! All the Scriptural themes find their fulfillment in a single creature, in Mary, Virgin and Mother of the Word of God.

### **At the end there will be only Christ**

From here we understand what Dionysus the Areopagite taught, a great eastern mystic of the fifth century, whose name we do not even know. It is called Dionysus the Mystic, but we do not know who he really is. In the interpretation of the Sacred Scripture it happens what this great mystic says: that the more we move away from God the more we need words, locutions; while the closer we get to Him, the more everything is reduced to one Truth, the simplicity of a unique event that is word and fulfillment of all the history of God: Christ and the Virgin.

What is Greater: the Bible or the Eucharist? What's bigger, the Eucharist or the glorious Christ, to whom we strive through our life? Answer me: it is the same. And it is true; but in the Bible the Christ presents himself through countless facts. In his terrestrial life all these themes of Scripture

are already present through one only mystery, because the whole history becomes only the life of Jesus. Even more: the life of Jesus becomes only his passion, death and resurrection. And in death and resurrection not only has everything fulfillment, but everything is accomplished in this act. So it is true that the Bible is not more than the Eucharist, nor is the Eucharist more than the Bible. But even in the Eucharist the veil will be removed and the Incarnated Word will stand alone. Note well: the Incarnate Word, but not the Incarnate Word alone, because the Eucharist, like all the sacraments, is *propter homines*. At the end it will be only Christ, but in the glorious Christ all of us too, will be with him one Christ. We do not still live it, **even if** through communion we live more and more a being in the unity of Christ.

Unity in Christ for us is not yet accomplished in a perfect way, because we always have a body that separates us from him, we live in one time and place that separates us from him. When we leave this world, then we will truly be with him as a single body, and we will live in him only one life that is his glorious life.

The distinction of our persons from the Incarnate Word will remain, but in the unity of one body and one spirit, because one will be the life. Everything tends to this unit.

Here is how Akathistos is the interpretation of the whole Bible. And I do not know if the exegesis of all our professors of Sacred Scripture has one greater depth than what this singer had, which he has seen all the Bible become present in its final fulfillment in the Holy Virgin.

They are not just images. Many times, reading this Hymn, you have the impression that poetic images multiply. No it's not only this, they are not poetic images; the author inspired by the Hymn really saw in Mary the fulfillment of what was before only prophecy, he saw in Mary the truth of what before has only been just a shadow, as St. Thomas says in the Lauda Sion Hymns: *Umbram fugat veritas*, the truth shoos away the shadow. And the shadow is the entire Old Testament. The truth, the

light of the presence of the Virgin and of Christ, makes the prophecy vanish, for prophecy finds its own fulfillment in her.

### **We are still pilgrims in time**

So why is the Bible still there? Because we still live in a partially prophetic time. Partially, because in itself and for itself the fulfillment took place in Jesus and in Mary; but we still have to realize this accomplishment. In fact, living in time and space and conducting a life still separated from Christ, we still live a certain path toward him that is present. But to the extent that he becomes present, the Bible too fails. And here's what Grandmaison said, based on the *Second Letter of Saint Peter*, who states that the whole universe will end in a fire burning everything. Then, says Grandmaison, all things will disappear in a fire where the purest flame will be the blaze of all the bibles because, in the face of the divine Word at last revealed, words are gone, only the vision remains.

True, but in the hymn, we see this reduction of all the themes, of all history to one presence, that of the Virgin; to one event which, in the hymn of the Acathistos, is the incarnation. If there is a fault in the Acathistos it is that it ends in the incarnation. The evangelical story here ends up with Simeon and the Magi, while the Madonna is also present at the foot of the cross. Sacred history does not end with the incarnation, but with the death of the cross, in which Jesus is on the cross and Mary at the foot of the cross. This is why we Westerners have had, especially in these last centuries, a living devotion to the sorrowful Virgin.

Because it is not enough to see Mary in the act in which she gives birth to the Son and presents Him to the world; we must recognize that the mystery of Mary, like the mystery of Jesus, has its fulfillment in death and in the resurrection of Christ. Therefore the association of Mary to the passion of Christ, the Sorrowful Virgin and then the glorious Virgin, the Assumption.

## To Jesus by Mary

Hence a wonderful thing comes about: not just on the level of exegesis but also of teaching, we have to see how everything is gathered in the presence of Christ and Mary.

But we must also realize that our spiritual life has to become more and more simplified in union with the incarnate Word, to live us too, our identification with Christ, to live more and more a profound assimilation to blessed Jesus and the Virgin Mary.

In fact, our identification with Christ is fulfilled in our union with the Virgin.

Why? Because our identification with Christ will make us live one only life with him, only one death and one resurrection, but in the distinction of the persons: the bride and groom. The bride will never be the groom, nor the groom will ever be the bride; there are two. And we too will live the life of Christ, but we will live it as the bride lives the same life of the groom, that is, in a union of love that leaves intact the distinction of the two people. If there was no such distinction of people, for us there would be no salvation, because with death every personal distinction would cease from the Word, and there would be nothing left of us. There would be Christ, but we would not be there anymore. While instead, there is only one Christ but, in Christ's unity, there still are I and He; the bride and groom.

I and he: the Mother and the Son. So the association with Christ, to which the Virgin has been called with her divine vocation, it does not end with the present life, because Mary now lives gloriously with Jesus in a same glory, while remaining distinct from him. And like the mother remains distinct from his son and the bride from the groom, so each of us will remain distinct from the divine Word, while living with the Incarnate Word, one same death and same life. Therefore, you see how it all ends up in one mystery and all life is nothing but being one with Christ keeping the

distinction of the persons. The union with Christ: even the Most Holy Virgin Mary has lived this and nothing else. The Virgin has not lived another life out of the life of her Son, but she did it as a mother, in the distinction from her son: so as the bride in the distinction from the groom.

And it is wonderful what Dionysus the Mystic said: everything is summed up in the unity. There are not many doctrines, many mysteries: there is only one mystery, that ineffable one of the love for which only one is the life, as only one is the man in Christ, as St. Paul says in the *Letter to the Galatians*.

Yes, only one man because even the spouses, according to *Genesis*, are only one flesh; so then all of us and Christ are one.

### **Why devotion to Mary**

However, as I said, we remain distinct as persons. That's what teaches us the Akathistos and here it is understood why the oriental Christianity loves this hymn so much, because it tells us, perhaps more than a lot of Marian theology, what the Virgin is. It tells us all with a poetic richness also too exuberant for our western taste, but this richness is in order to teach us how the entire Old Testament prefigures the Virgin. She is the temple; she is the irrigated garden, the heaven on earth; she is the army of God who wins all the battles: Mary is the daughter of David. The whole Old Testament is she alone!

This teaching seems to me very important because if we do not understand it, we cannot even grasp the devotion of the Church for the Virgin. This devotion has only this justification: the fact that the Church sees in Mary, as also *Lumen Gentium* teaches, the type of the whole Church. Not because the Church overcomes the Virgin and not even because the Virgin overtakes the Church. If each of us are the whole Church, according to the teachings of St. Pier Damiani and of St. Bonaventure, however, it is true that this is accomplished in full, in a definitive and perfect way, only in Mary.

And if Mary is really all the Church, then we understand how all the teaching of the divine revelation may be present in the mystery of the Virgin. Not regardless of Christ, but because she and Christ are the mystery of the alliance, they are *berith*. An alliance always supposes two parts, there cannot be an alliance of only one. It is the divine Word that unites himself to Mary and Mary, who joins the divine Word; union that keeps people distinct one from the other, but in the unity of the same life.

Here it is justified the devotion to Mary. If I live my relationship with her, I must actualize all the Bible in this relationship with the Virgin.

It's not just about teaching, it's about seeing how the Bible, like the Word of God that is incarnated, finds its last fulfillment in Mary. Mary then associates herself to me, here is my devotion and she makes me participate in her mystery. I'm a person who must join Christ our Lord as the Virgin has joined him, am I not? And here then Mary's life becomes the exemplary cause of our holiness.

Therefore we must not feel strangers to the Bible; I'm in there!

I am too sharing in a divine maternity; I am also a participant of the Virgin's marriage with Christ. I'm also a part of all that the Virgin has accomplished in herself. In her everything has been accomplished in a perfect way, in a transcendent way towards every other human creature. Then, in me, there is some participation to the same mystery.

### **Christian life, participation in Mary's Motherhood...**

Why are we also part of this maternity? Because Christ must live in us. It is Saint Paul who says it: Christ must be born in our hearts. And it is the entire Christian tradition that sees in the Christian way of life the conceiving in our soul of the Word, which draws on itself our very body to live through it. Through our eyes it is Christ who wants to see; through our heart it is Christ who wants to love; through our hands it is Christ who wants to operate. Do you remember the



Portuguese poetry that Marcello Candia liked so much?

"I do not have hands anymore, give me your hands, so that I might work; I no longer have eyes, give me your eyes so I might see." It is a divine maternity, we give him our human nature so that he may live in our human nature. Mary most Holy gave her body to Jesus; we give him our body for him to live in us. In Mary Most Holy there was a childbirth that separated the child from the mother; in us this separation does not happen anymore. The distinction remains, but separation no longer takes place. If a separation occurs, this only happens when "we give birth to Christ" in other souls, as Saint Paul says in his *Letter to the Galatians*.

This too is one of the fundamental themes of Christian spirituality, which also appears in St. Francis of Assisi in the *Alerts and Highs*<sup>8</sup>.

So we participate in a divine motherhood and we participate in the same way that has been lived by Mary. And Mary did not become a mother through her union with another man, but by accepting God's Word which is seed: *Semen est Verbum Dei*. By accepting the word of God and preserving it in herself, she becomes mother. And we too will be part of a divine motherhood in welcoming the Word, which for now is only written. And a word refers to a thing; but what does the word of God refer to? To the Verbum that is to be born in each of us, to the Verbum that must become flesh in us, because if it does not become flesh, it remains a word; a word which has not been realized, a word which has not become incarnate.

### **... and her spousal union with the Word**

Then how the Bible is realized in Jesus and Mary so, depending on the Virgin and on our union with her, the Bible must be realized also in each of us.

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8

And here is the mystery of our participation in the divine maternity. Not only we participate in a divine maternity, and it is also understood by this how Mary is the exemplar cause of holiness for all Christians: but we also participate in the marriage union with the Word. In fact Most Holy Mary as she gives her body, is a mother; but as she receives the whole holiness of the Incarnate Word, is the bride. The groom gives himself completely to the bride; not his body, because the bodies remain separate but all his life; he gives her the very soul in a unique destiny of life. And this is what Christ does for the Virgin: he gives her all the wealth of his holiness. The Spiritual life, and it is the tradition of the Church that affirms it, was always seen as a fulfillment of a divine wedding. The last act of the spiritual life in St. John of the Cross, St. Bernard, as in Saint Teresa, is the marriage union with Christ, the transforming union. Well, even in this bridal union we participate to the mystery of Mary because, as we all give all of ourselves to the Word, so we receive from the Word his holiness. To the extent that we really give all of us to him through our participation in the divine maternity, he gives himself to us as a groom because we live his same life. Here it is how Mary becomes an example of holiness for us. It's a holiness to which no longer it is important the only listening to the word, but which engages the soul to incarnate and live it: it works in such a way that the Word not only teaches us, but becomes flesh in each of us and alive in our same life. And it requires that we live our participation in the mystery of Mary also by welcoming, in the Word, the same holiness of God. Because since the Virgin gives a body to our Lord, she is mother, but still does not live the Son's life; but because she is bride, she welcomes the whole life of the Son, and this is not a simply human life. The life of the Word of God is grace, it is divine life, and the Virgin welcomes this divine life and lives the same life of the Son of God. Here is the Most Holy Mary! We see in her the last term of all of the divine operations through which God communicates

himself to the world, and in her we see the exemplary cause of our entire spiritual life.

There are some books in the history of Christian spirituality that light up what I told you. There is especially a Carmelite who lived in the 1600, Father Michele of the Blessed Sacrament, who wrote one of his book to clarify how the life of each religious soul is nothing, but a certain imitation of the life of the Most Holy Mary, since deeply associated with Christ and at the same time distinct from him. So we too must live our life as identification with Christ, living the very life of Jesus but in our own distinction from Him as the mother did from her son, as the bride did from the groom. When the bride or groom dies, the other part remains a widow, there is no marriage anymore. So there would not be anymore for us the chance to live our lives in Christ, if we did not remain separated from Him. This distinction is given by the mystery of the covenant, for which eternally remain Jesus and Mary, Mary and Jesus.

### **To have Mary as model**

What to say at the end of this retreat? That not only we have to love Mary, but we must be like her in her interior dispositions, in her abandonment to the Spirit, in her recollection, in her constantly meditating on the word of God. What does the gospel say about Mary Most Holy? It says that before anything else she totally abandons herself to the word she heard: "Make me according to your word." The Word then, does not stay as word: "make me" means in fact a realization. The Word, if it stays only as a word, condemns us: "I am not the one who condemns you; it is the Word that you have heard that will condemn you", says Jesus in the fourth Gospel.

In the misure by which we hear the word, we are committed to doing in such a way that this word may become flesh in us and be realized by means of us. Here is the first thing the Madonna did.

But then what does the gospel say of her? She says that she kept all these words in her heart and meditated on them. It is about having a constant contact with the Word until it becomes incarnate.

The Gospel also speaks to us of a continuous association of the Virgin to all the mysteries of Christ. We find her in the temple when she presents the child; we find her at the wedding of Cana; we find her at the foot of the cross. Always Mary with Jesus and Jesus with Mary. This also tells us to how constantly we must live with Jesus. Jesus must be the companion of our journey, must be the one from whom we can never detach ourselves. It is what St. Ignatius of Antioch said: our life is inseparable from Jesus. This is for us the first task, this is the first law of any Christian: to live a life of dependence on the Spirit of God as Mary lived it, to live an ever more alive, intimate and continuous union with Jesus.

### **This teaches us Mary Most Holy**

If we forget about our Lord, we return to live one human life devoid of any sense, devoid of salvation. It is not said that we commit sin; to do a sin in fact, we must go against the divine will, but we live a life without value, meaningless, without the wealth of grace. In fact the wealth of grace, the fullness of holiness arise from this continuous live relationship with the Blessed Jesus.

Then, the first thing that is required to be Christians, is the relationship with Christ, to be a follower of Christ. Following Jesus and doing his will makes us his disciples, his brothers and friends, as were the twelve, for then to be like Mary, the mother and bride of Christ. The bridal union with the Word is the ultimate term of our spiritual life. But before we get to this, we need an apprenticeship in the spiritual life, not so much to know Him as to know ourselves and to see how different we are from Him.

It is the path of the disciple, a path which increasingly introduces us into the friendship of Christ, and into a deeper

intimacy with him. When this intimacy is full, then one will live in the other, as Jesus said to the Apostles: *Manete in me et ego in vobis*, abide in me and I in you. One has to come to be one in the other, but that is only possible with Jesus. By faith, in fact, only He can live in us and we can live in Him. Intimacy with Christ brings us to live the mutual immanence of one in the other: we in Him and He in us. But we arrive to this only through a long apprenticeship: the discipleship, the friendship, the bond of fraternity, and finally through the total gift of ourselves to Him and Him to us. Total gift that among men can never happen because we are divided. You can donate to the other your affection, but there can never be total immanence of each other, the full gift of ourselves to others. We give ourselves to each other through the body, which however, while it is a means of union, it is also impediment to a full union. Perfect union can only happen among spirits. Christ, who has become a living spirit, can really live in us. And we too will live in Him when we are transformed by the Divine Spirit.

And this is the teaching that comes to us from the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin: Mary model of Christian life. Maria is this model even before than for her virtues, for this her association with Christ who makes her the Mother of the Word and the Bride of Christ.

### **The hidden greatness of our lives**

So really all Christian life is summed up in our relationship with the Word and in the relationship of the Word to each of us. And the life of each of us is no less great than the whole world history. If the whole story of the world is in order, then, to the death and resurrection of Christ in the covenant that He establishes with man, if I live this covenant, even my life has the same breadth of the life of the universe.

So many times we seem to live such a poor life, so miserable! It's not true. It's not absolutely true! We live in our lives, poor in phenomenal sense, a reality that infinitely overcomes the whole story of the world, because we live a relationship

with God who is eternal, because we live a relationship with God who is immense.

This is what tells us the life of Mary who, in appearance, has led a life as any other woman of his time. But in this life of bottomless humility, the Virgin has lived a perfect relationship with the Word of God.

And it is this relationship that tells the greatness of her existence. In the simplicity of her life, she realizes the whole Bible, she implements all the mystery of God.

Let's then live this relationship with Christ through Mary and in Mary. And this is the teaching that gives us the greatest devotee of Mary Most Blessed, Saint Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort: *Ad Jesum per Mariam*. We must make this journey that leads to the intimacy with Christ, led by the Virgin, by her example, by the imitation of how she lived.

This is what I had in mind to tell you tonight, commenting briefly about the Akathistos. Often we read this Hymn as one great lyric poem, beautiful, with all those poetic images; and we do not realize that they want to teach us the realization of the whole Bible. Mary only suffices to accomplish the whole Bible, but not independently of Christ. Christ and Mary.

A.M.D.G.