



The Holy See

PILGRIMAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO LOURDES ON THE OCCASION OF 150TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE PROMULGATION OF THE DOGMA
OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

Prairie de la Ribère
Sunday, 15 August 2004

1. "*Que soy era Immaculada Councepciou*". The words which Mary spoke to Bernadette on 25 March 1858 have a particular resonance this year, as the Church celebrates the 150th anniversary of the solemn definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception by Blessed Pius IX in the Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*.

I have greatly wished to make this pilgrimage to Lourdes in order to celebrate an event which continues to *give glory to the Triune God*. Mary's Immaculate Conception is the sign of the gracious love of the *Father*, the perfect expression of the redemption accomplished by the *Son* and the beginning of a life completely open to the working of the *Spirit*.

2. Beneath the maternal gaze of the Blessed Virgin I offer a heartfelt greeting to all of you, dear brothers and sisters, as we gather before the Grotto of Massabielle to sing the praises of her whom all generations call blessed (cf. *Lk* 1:48).

In particular I greet the French pilgrims and their Bishops, especially the President of the Episcopal Conference [name?] and Monsignor Jacques Perrier, the Bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes, whom I thank for his kind words at the start of this celebration.

I also greet the Minister of the Interior, who represents the French Government at today's celebration, and the other civil and military authorities present.

My thoughts and prayers go also to the pilgrims assembled here from different parts of Europe and from throughout the

world, and to all those spiritually united with us by radio and television. With special affection I greet the sick and all who have come to this holy place to seek consolation and hope. May the Blessed Virgin enable you to sense her presence and give comfort to your hearts!

3. *"In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country..." (Lk 1:39).* The words of the Gospel story have once more brought before the eyes of our hearts the young maiden of Nazareth as she makes her way to that *"city of Judah"* where her kinswoman Elizabeth lived, in order to be of help to her.

What strikes us about Mary is above all *her loving concern* for her elderly relative. Hers is a *practical love*, one which is not limited to words of understanding but is deeply and personally involved in giving help. The Blessed Virgin does not merely give her cousin something of herself; *she gives her whole self*, asking nothing in return. Mary understood perfectly that the gift she received from God is more than a *privilege*; it is a *duty* which obliges her to serve others with the selflessness proper to love.

4. *"My soul magnifies the Lord..." (Lk 1:46).* Mary's sentiments in her meeting with Elizabeth are forcefully expressed in the canticle of the *Magnificat*. Her words convey the *hope-filled expectation* of the "poor of the Lord" and at the same time an *awareness that God has fulfilled his promises*, for he *"has remembered his mercy"* (cf. Lk 1:54).

This same awareness is the source of that *joy* of the Virgin Mary which pervades the whole canticle: *joy* in knowing that she has been "looked upon" by God despite her own "lowliness" (cf. Lk 1:48); *joy* in the "service" she is able to offer because of the "great things" to which the Almighty has called her (cf. Lk 1:49); *joy* in her foretaste of the eschatological blessedness promised to "those of low degree" and "the hungry" (cf. Lk 1:52-53).

The *Magnificat* is followed by *silence: nothing is said to us* about the three months that Mary stayed with her kinswoman Elizabeth. Yet perhaps we are told the most important thing: that *goodness works quietly*, the power of love is expressed in the unassuming quietness of daily service.

5. By her words and her silence the Virgin Mary stands before us as a model for our pilgrim way. *It is not an easy way*. as a result of the fall of our first parents, humanity is marked by the wounds of sin, whose consequences continue to be felt also among the redeemed. But evil and death *will not have the last word!* Mary confirms this by her whole life, for she is a *living witness of the victory of Christ, our Passover*.

The faithful have understood this. That is why they throng to this grotto in order to hear the maternal counsels of the Blessed Virgin. In her they acknowledge "the woman clothed in the sun" (Rev 12:1), the Queen resplendent before the throne of God (cf. *Responsorial Psalm*), ever interceding on their behalf.

6. Today the Church celebrates *Mary's glorious Assumption body and soul into Heaven*. The two dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption are *closely related*. Both proclaim the glory of Christ the Redeemer and the holiness of Mary, whose human destiny is even now perfectly and definitively realized in God.

"When I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am, there you may be

also" (*Jn 14: 3*). *Mary is the pledge of the fulfilment of Christ's promise*. Her Assumption thus becomes for us "a sign of sure hope and consolation" (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 68).

7. Dear brothers and sisters! From this grotto of Massabielle the Blessed Virgin speaks to us too, the Christians of the third millennium. Let us listen to her!

Listen to her, *young people* who seek an answer capable of giving meaning to your lives. *Here you can find that answer*. It is a demanding one, yet it is *the only answer which is genuinely satisfying*. For it contains the secret of true joy and peace.

From this grotto I issue a special call to *women*. Appearing here, Mary entrusted her message *to a young girl*, as if to emphasize *the special mission of women* in our own time, tempted as it is by materialism and secularism: to be in today's society *a witness of those essential values* which are seen only with the eyes of the heart. To you, women, falls the task of being *sentinels of the Invisible!* I appeal urgently to all of you, dear brother and sisters, to do everything in your power to ensure that life, each and every life, will be respected from conception to its natural end. Life is a sacred gift, and no one can presume to be its master.

Finally, Our Lady of Lourdes has *a message for everyone*. *Be men and women of freedom!* But remember: human freedom is a freedom wounded by sin. It is a freedom which itself needs to be set free. *Christ is its liberator*, he is the one who "for freedom has set us free" (cf. *Gal 5:1*). Defend that freedom!

Dear friends, in this we know we can count on Mary, who, since she never yielded to sin, is the only creature who is perfectly free. I entrust you to her. Walk beside Mary as you journey towards the complete fulfilment of your humanity!