

Content**Dear Brother,**

The document below presents 8 Marian celebrations and 32 Marian texts. They may help to stress more this month of May 2012. We continue an effort we started on May 2010, and May 2011.

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1-In the Shelter of Your Mercy

Mary our Mother, we wish to tell you how great is our trust in you. We wish to join ourselves to all the generations that have called you blessed; that have so often raised their hearts to you in praise, prayer, joy and - so many times too - in their suffering. Because you are our Mother, wondrous gift given us by your dying yet all powerful Son, we address our prayer to you. Truly you can assist us. Truly you wish to help us, because you are mother, because Jesus has placed his heart within you.

New Testament Message

Mary, our confidence in you is not solely a praiseworthy filial sentiment. It is rather obedience to the word of God which tells us of your presence in all the key moments of salvation history, moments in which the Trinity was present in its threefold reality.



In the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul writes, "When the completion of the time came, God [the Father] sent his Son, born of a woman, born a subject of the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law, so that we could receive the adoption as sons. As you are sons, God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son crying, 'Abba, Father'." In the text we find that: the Father is present; the Son has been sent; the Spirit has been poured out into our hearts. And you, Mary, you are present in the text as well.

Refrain: (What follows or another as preferred)

*To follow Christ as Mary did, this now the pearl we seek together;
You call us forth to be your people, your living word made flesh today.*

At the Annunciation, God [the Father] sends Gabriel to announce the coming of the Son; and upon you, Mary, came the power of the Holy Spirit.

Refrain: To follow Christ

In the moment of his death, Jesus gives us his Mother, and commits his Spirit into the hands of the Father

We can see clearly how Mary is present in the key moments of salvation history. She is always present through grace. She is always there to cooperate with what God's grace is accomplishing; nonetheless she is there. How can one not see that God wishes to approach us through Mary?

Refrain: To follow Christ

At Cana, Mary takes our problems upon herself; she takes the first step towards her Son, to tell him about our situation and its difficulties. The consequences are quite remarkable. Jesus is the focus of the scene, and we get the key to understanding what we will hear: "Do whatever he tells you."

The new wine appears. Jesus reveals his glory; the disciples believe in him; all, starting with Mary, begin following in his footsteps.

At Cana, Mary teaches us all the means needed to follow Jesus upon the way of



discipleship.

Song:

*Sing of Mary, pure and lowly, Virgin Mother undefiled;
Sing of God's own Son most holy, who became her little child.
Fairest child of fairest mother, God the Lord who came to earth,
Word made flesh, our very brother, takes our nature by his birth.*

1- The People of God

Throughout the history of the Church, believers have turned to Mary with confidence. Prayers in her honor have become more numerous over the centuries. The "Sub tuum" ("We fly to your patronage") was already popular in the Church of Alexandria at the end of the third century. A bit later, the first part of the Hail Mary made its appearance. The "Ave Maris Stella" was a well loved hymn in the eighth century, and later comes the Memorare of Saint Bernard. Icons have become ever more widely known, and they appear more frequently in our churches.

Then there are the sanctuaries. The oldest ones, like Santa Maria in Trastevere found in one of the oldest neighborhoods of Rome, go back to the third century. Others were built immediately after the Council of Ephesus in 432. Today Marian sanctuaries draw hundreds of millions of pilgrims who bring with them not only their desire to honor Mary but also the problems and sufferings they must face. The names are familiar: Lourdes, Fatima Guadalupe, Loretto, Chzestochova, Medjournie; and there are others too. The "Instinct" of the People of God is the Spirit, and the prayer of the People of God is simple: "Mary, Mother of the Lord, hear our prayer; grant us your Son!"

Song:

*Sing of Jesus, son of Mary, in the home at Nazareth.
Toil and labor cannot weary love enduring unto death.
Constant was the love he gave her, though it drove him from her side,
Forth to preach and heal and suffer, till on Calvary he died.*

In the history of the Church, no one has become holy without a devotion to Mary. The Holy Spirit, "Instinct" of holiness, causes the believer to turn towards the mother as the one who knows her Son best, who may draw upon the treasures of love contained in the heart of Jesus, the one whose sole desire is to make him known.

As early as the year 107, Ignatius of Antioch expressed his praise of the Virgin in the letters he wrote as he made his way towards martyrdom. But Ignatius had been preceded by John, the Beloved Disciple, the one who took Mary "into his home," a phrase to be pondered, given the depths of meaning in John's Gospel. The praise given to Mary by Ignatius was anticipated by the nascent Church praying in communion with the Mother of Jesus while awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit. Ignatius was preceded by Elizabeth as well for she had proclaimed Mary as Mother of the Lord, woman blessed because of her faith.

There is a current running through the entire history of the Church, from the Gospels up to John Paul II whose coat of arms included the phrase "Totus Tuus," that is, "All for You." And today, Pope Benedict XVI closes all the important gathering at which he is present by addressing the Mother of the Lord in prayer.

*Song: Glory be to God the Father, glory be to God the Son;
Glory be to God the Spirit; Glory to the Three in One.
From the heart of Blessed Mary, from all saints the song ascends,
And the Church the strain re-echoes, unto earth's remotest ends.*

3. Truly a Mother

Some Christians tend to see in Mary simply the *medium* through which the Son has entered the world. Mary becomes something cold and impersonal. As a consequence she has no claim upon our praise or our gratitude. We know that God has willed it otherwise. He wanted his Son to have a mother, who would bear the Son for nine months, would speak to him and love him while he was yet in the womb. Mary will love her infant, kiss him, rock him, nourish him, teach him to speak, walk, pray. Mary accepts too the *sufferings* that will be entailed in being Jesus' mother, "and a sword will pierce your soul too...." Jesus is not merely a *likeness* of a human person. No, he was an infant, with the needs that every infant has. He hung upon the Cross as a man suffering real pains, undergoing a real death; and, above all, as one who loves unto the end.

We treasure these features of Jesus' human experience, features to which his mother gave her greatest attention. She was the first to love God incarnated in human nature, anticipating of her Son's directive that we should love him in the poor, the sick, the prisoner. Mary then was the first to love God in the human person.

If Mary had been but a "medium," she could not have suffered anxiety during the three days when Jesus remained behind in the Temple. She could not have stood at the foot of the Cross nor joined the community of believers at prayer in the Cenacle. The opposite is the case: Mary longed for Jesus, received and loved Jesus who in a human nature like ours first encountered love from Mary, the love of the First Commandment. His mother loved him with all her heart, all her soul, all her mind, all her strength. For the first time, an infant was loved as *God* is to be loved.

(A time for silence and personal prayer)

It has been said that all the Apparitions of Mary are ways by which she expresses her motherly care and concern. By far, the most striking trait of the apparitions is that they become *Eucharistic* places, where the Word is spoken, where Christ is proclaimed, is carried in procession among the sick. The Marian sanctuaries are above all places where God is worshipped.

At the Marian sanctuaries, Mary awaits the pilgrims. Many Christians renew their faith; others rediscover it. There, atheists discover a revelation of the God who is love, of a God who has drawn close to the human family by being son of Mary. This son of Mary becomes bread for the journey, becomes wine, so that his blood may flow through our veins. At the Marian sanctuaries, the Virgin Mary renews Forever her Magnificat, pure praise of God.



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Mary is ever speaking of Jesus.
Jesus is ever speaking of Abba, Father,
in the Holy Spirit.

We do well to sing of Mary. We do well to share with her all our difficulties and all our joys. She joins herself to us in the song. She teaches us how to sing to God, how to sing of His wonderful works, especially of the gift he has made to us in his Son.

Sing or recite the Magnificat.

2-Salve Regina

On 22 August, the Church remembers the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen. Intimately associated with the mystery of Christ, Mary has a part in the kingship of her Son: she is the mother of the King, the Queen Mother.

Chant

Blessed are you, Lord,
In honour of the Virgin Mary,
Blessed are you, Lord.

1-You are beautiful, Our Lady, with the Father, in Paradise,

With the gifts of the Lord, whose love sings in your life.

2-In the Kingdom of light where God has set you near him,

You are Queen and you shine like the dawn in the night.

3-From now on, in all times, the little and the great will bless you

For being the one in whom the Word was made flesh.



The Son is King

There was a time when I asked myself questions about singing the Salve Regina. On earth, Mary was the servant, one of the poor of Yahweh, a very simple country woman from Nazareth. What connection was there with Mary the queen, so sumptuously dressed by Renaissance painters?

I became reconciled with the Queen mother when I looked at the King who was her Son.

1-He is the King present in every human in distress.

All: Glory to you, King humble, hidden, infinitely human.

2-He is the King who comes as witness of the Truth and all those for the Truth listen to his voice.

All: Glory to you, King, great witness of the Truth.

3-He is the King whose crown is pleated with thorns.

All: Glory to you, King humble and humiliated, true King, we adore you.

4-Such is the title nailed on his cross, his condemnation: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

All: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, we adore you.

5-He is the King whose heart will be pierced, a king with a wide open heart.

All : Glory to you, King with the pierced heart.

And you, Mary, you were at the foot of the cross, beside the dying King, beside the King with the wide open heart. And you thought of what Gabriel had told you on the day of the Annunciation: « You will conceive a son, he will be great, and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will reign over the house of Jacob, and his reign will have no end. »

Refr : Glory to you, Saviour of mankind,

Our leader and our king!

Glory to you for your kingdom:

May it come! Hosanna!

You are at the foot of the cross, Mary, where the King is dying, and you see the Magi again. They are looking for « the King of the Jews » who has just been born, and before your infant king they prostrate themselves and offer their treasures, their love, their faith.



This King, Mary, you were the one who raised him. How can the admiration we have for him not reflect on you, the Mother of the King, the Queen Mother?

Refr : Glory to you, Saviour of mankind, Our leader and our king!

Glory to you for your kingdom: May it come! Hosanna!

Mary, Queen

1-Mary, you are the King's Mother, how can you not be queen?

You are queen to be powerfully mother, to concern yourself with the humanity Jesus has entrusted to you. *Hail, Mary...*

2-Mary, you have the qualities of your Son to be queen: you are humble like him, poor like him, like him you choose the humble, the hungry... *Hail, Mary...*

3-Mary, you are attentive like the King to our human needs and you say to the King: « They have no wine. » *Hail, Mary...*

4-Mary, you were the Mother of the King on the day of the Annunciation; you were the King's throne when the Magi came; you were still the King's Mother beneath the cross, and it was there that the good thief said: « Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom! » And your Son, the King, responded: « This day you will be with me in Paradise! » (Lk 23 : 42-43) With the whole Church, we say to you:

Blessed are you, Queen of the martyrs,

Associated with the passion of Christ, your Son;

You have become our Mother,

A sure sign of hope on our journey.

5-Still today, Mary, you are our Queen, and many come to you, because you are Mother, and because you are powerful. Since its beginnings, since the first storm, our religious family has sung to you the Salve Regina.

Refr : We salute you, our Queen, we salute you.

1-You who give life, our Queen, you who give life.

You who give hope, our Queen, you who give hope. *Refr*.

2-Show us your Son in our Brothers, show us your Son.

Make his face shine on us, make his face shine. *Refr*.

Children of the Kingdom

1-Mary, God gives us as King, his Son, your Son. And, in his love, he makes us pass over to the Kingdom of his beloved Son.

All: And with joy give thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to have your share of what God has reserved for his people in the kingdom of light. He rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us safe into the Kingdom of his dear Son. Col. 1 : 12-13.

2-Mary, the love of God makes of us children of the Kingdom, sons of God, brothers of the King.

All: « But you are the chosen race, the King's priests, the holy nation, God's own people. » 1Peter 2 : 9.

3-Mary, our Queen and our Mother, we pray to you to remain worthy of the dignity which has been given us.

Tous : « Those who in advance he knew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that the latter might be the first born of a multitude of brothers. »

4-Mary, make us frequently meet with the King in order to become true children of the Kingdom. May we meet him in the Word, in the Eucharist, in prayer and in our brothers and sisters in distress.

All: « Then the King will say to them: 'Come you that are blessed by my Father! Come and possess the kingdom which has been prepared for you ever since the creation of the world'. »

5-Mary, make of our life a proclamation of the King and an announcement of his Kingdom.

All: And our voices say that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Conclusion

Mary, it is with a certain emotion that we think of the first Salve Regina in our Marist family. The one which Father Champagnat had the Brothers sing before the visit of the king's inspector to the Hermitage in 1830.

Since then, every Marist generation has continued, morning and evening, to take up this chant, which has become one of the characteristics of our family. It asks you, Mary, to be a mother to us, to be merciful, compassionate, tender, to show us your Son and to turn your eyes and his towards us. But this song is one the whole Church sings to you, Mary:

Salve Regina,

Mater misericordiae,
vita, dulcedo et spes nostra,
salve.

Ad te clamamus,

exules filii Evae.

Ad te suspiramus,

gementes et flentes

in hac lacrimarum valle.



Eia ergo, advocata nostra,

illos tuos misericordes oculos

at nos converte.

Et Jesum,

benedictum fructum ventris tui,

nobis post hoc exilium ostende.

O clemens,

o pia,

o dulcis Virgo Maria.

3-THE ANNUNCIATION

Luke 1, 26-38

1. – Introductory Word

The scene of the Annunciation is well-known, perhaps even a little too “spiritualised”, “disembodied”. The event is extraordinary, but it reaches into the simplicity of life and that not in a temple, but in a very small village and probably in a very modest house.

Mary is not a cloistered Sister ; she is barely adolescent, betrothed to Joseph.

God wishes to make himself present. Art has placed kneelers, a beautiful opened Bible, an angel with splendid wings, shining rays, pillars, and Mary dressed as a queen.

In reality, Mary was a simple woman of the people, a worker like others.

It is the normality of life that God breaks into. It is the normality of my life that God wants to break into.

2. *Hymn to Mary (chosen by the facilitator)*

3. Reading of the text of the Annunciation, Luke 1, 26-38

*In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God into a town of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man of the House of David, named Joseph. The name of the virgin was Mary. The angel entered her house and said: **I greet you, you to whom a grace has been given; the Lord is with thee.***
(In two choirs)

We salute you, Mary, you to whom a great grace has been given.

We greet you Mary, because the Lord is with you.

We greet you, Mary, with all your ancestors : Adam, Abraham, David...

We greet you, Mary, with all the prophets.

We greet you, Mary, with your people in exile.

We greet you, Mary, with all the poor of Israel.

We greet you, Mary, with all the disciples of your Son.

We greet you, Mary with all the Church.

We greet you, Mary, with all our Marist Family.

We greet you, Mary, with all those who are enamoured with your Son.

We greet you, Mary, with all the joys of our humanity.

Reflection : The Lord is with thee

What good news : God is with the one who represents us all, with you, Mary. It is as if the angel Gabriel said to us: “The Lord is with you ; the Lord has made a choice to be with humanity, beside humanity in the adventure of life. The lord is with you.” Mary you are not different from us, you are the one who has anticipated us.

How many times the Bible has said : “The Lord is with you!” With you, Adam and with you Eve, in the comings and goings of the first days, when time was still at its dawn. With you, Abraham, father in faith, with you, Moses, to accomplish the freedom of his people who then became your people ; with you, David, the well-beloved, with you People of God in exile, with you, Isaiah, who, searching the misty horizon of history, announces the Son of the Virgin, Emmanuel... The Lord has been with you, Marcellin, and you know you have been loved. He has been with you, Basilio who have walked with us prophesying the new religious life. He is with you, Emili, who have taken the baton of the pilgrim from Sean’s hands, to recommence among us the Superior’s paternal visitations... For nothing can separate us from the love that God bears us in Christ Jesus, Our Lord.

Mary, God, who will be your child, is with you, and is also the one who tells us at the end of his human adventure : “Here I am, with you right up until the end of time!”

To you Mary, the Lord promises a son, the Life. The same Spirit of the Lord has directed our Chapter and our Province to make the choice “the new land” and to “passionately centre our lives on Jesus”, following your example.

*Troubled by these words, Mary asked herself who could be greeting her in such a way. The angel said to her: **Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found grace before God.***

Soloist

Do not fear, Mary
Do not fear, my Brother
Do not fear, prodigal child
Do not fear, you the superior of the community
Do not fear, you to whom a new responsibility
is confided
Do not fear, for ...
Mary has also passed this way...

ALL

you have found grace before God.
you have found grace before God.
you have found grace before God.
you have found grace before God.
You have found grace before God.
She precedes us on the path of availability.

*And thus, you will become with child and **you will bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David, his father. He will reign over the house of Jacob eternally, and his reign will never end.***

Soloist

You will bear a son, your first-born,
While awaiting those you will bear
At the foot of the Cross,
You will give him the name of Jesus;
You will give him the name of Jesus,

You will give him the name of Jesus,

You will give him the name of Jesus,

ALL

while waiting to become my mother also.
a name that is above all names.
the name before which every knee will bend
In heaven, on earth and under the earth.
the only name which must be given us to be
saved.
the name of the one who is **great, Son of the Most High, King forever.**

(Hymn to Mary, chosen by facilitator)

*Mary says to the angel: **How can this be since I know not man?***

1. – What man can give me a child who will be great, Son of the Most High,
King forever and whose name will be Jesus : God saves?
2. - I do not know of a man who can give me such a son.
3. - This Son cannot be the fruit of a human love.

*The angel replied to her: **The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will cover you with his shadow. That is why the holy child who will be born of you will be called the Son of God. And here, Elisabeth, your cousin, has conceived, she also, a son in her old age, and she who was called sterile is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible to God.***

Solo

ALL

The Holy Spirit will come upon you, Mary
 The Holy Spirit will come upon you, Mary

The Holy Spirit will come upon you, Mary
 The Holy Spirit will come upon you, Mary
 The Holy Spirit will come upon you, Mary
 The Holy Spirit will come upon you, Mary
 The Holy Spirit will come upon you, Mary

The Holy Spirit will come upon us, Mary,

Mary, with you we believe that

*and your child shall be the holy One.
 and your child will be called Son of
 God.*

the spirit of Genesis.

the Spirit who has spoken through the prophets.

the Spirit who leads to the total truth.

the Spirit of Pentecost.

*the Spirit who at each Mass changes the bread and
 wine into the body and blood of your Son, Our Lord.*

*and in our lives will be born the Holy One, the one
 who is called Son of God.*

nothing is impossible for God.

*Mary said: "I am the servant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to
 Your word! And the angel left her.*

Solo

I am the servant of the child who comes,
 I am the servant in the mystery of salvation,
 In the Church, I am the servant
 In the humanity I am the servant,
 I am the mother and the servant of Jesus

ALL

*we will be the servants of this child.
 we are the servants of the mystery of salvation.
 in the Church we are the servants.
 of all our brothers we are the servants.
 we are the servants of Our Lord.*

*A time of silence centred on the availability of Mary : I am the servant of the Lord, let it be done to
 me according to His word!*

Constitutions, Art. 18 :

*Mary, chosen by God to be completely his, is the model of our consecration. At the Annunciation, she
 Welcomed in faith the word of the Lord ; she gave herself up with joy and love to the action of the
 Holy Spirit, by the total gift of herself. Her heart, that of a woman and a mother, experienced the
 Joys and trials of life. Beside Jesus, she lived an entire confidence in the Father, right up to the foot
 Of the cross.*

Hymn to Mary (chosen by the facilitator)

Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth
Lk 1, 39-55

1. Mary sets out in haste... enters the house of Zachariah and greets Elizabeth.

We are on the first Christian mission.
For the first time Jesus is brought
Along the pathways forged by men and women;
For the first time he enters a home;
For the first time a family welcomes him.

Mary, his mother, is the missionary.
Following in her vigorous footsteps
Will be Peter, Paul, Francis Xavier,
And our Founder, who was fond of saying:
“Our plans call for making Jesus known and loved
In every diocese in the world”

Mary's is the first Christian mission:
She hurries along, brings greetings,
and the Annunciation moves on
From Nazareth to the hills in Judea

The joy of the Annunciation impels her.
The child being formed in her womb is her engine within
And is now penetrating into every corner of her heart

Let us pray for the missions in today's Church:
That Jesus will animate them and they will bring people his presence. *Hail Mary...*

Mary is a missionary to her cousin... going on a mission doesn't mean we travel a given number of miles; rather that we introduce Jesus to those we meet and greet. *Hail Mary...*
Mary feels within her a sense of urgency to share her joy and offer her treasure. *Hail Mary*

A hymn to our Blessed Mother



2. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb

This leap is the first mission of the Precursor. He alerts his mother Elizabeth and enables her to gain insights into what is happening.

The child in Elizabeth's womb is the first to react to Mary's greeting, the first to be sensitive to the presence of the Other; a presence that will define his entire mission as the prophet of the Most High: to prepare the people, prepare their way to the Messiah; to identify the Lamb of God and point him out to the first disciples.

Mary, bring your greetings, together with your son, to my home. At the sound of your voice my innermost being will tremble. May the child of grace stir within me, may the prophet of the Most High awaken in me and may I hasten to prepare the paths of the Lord.

Psalm

Antiphon (chosen by the prayer leader)

1. Bless the Lord, O my soul!
O Lord, my God, How great you are!
And how great are your works!
The earth is filled with your wonders. *Antiphon*

2. You are the one who has knit me in my mother's womb;
In the light of our presence
I recognize what a prodigy,
What an astonishing being I am! *Antiphon*

3. You knew everything that was going on
When I was formed in the secret of my mother's womb;
I wasn't even ready to be born and yet
You already knew my life from start to finish! *Antiphon*

4. The glory of the Lord endures forever.
The Lord is proud of all His works.
May he be pleased with our hymn!
We find our true joy in the Lord. *Antiphon*

3. A hymn to the Mother of our Lord

Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice saying:

"Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."

And how does this happen to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy.

Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

1 Here we have a hymn from one mother to another.

2 A hymn from an elderly mother to a young one.

3 One from the mother of the Precursor to the mother of the Messiah.

4 From the last mother in the Old Testament to the first mother in the New Testament.

5 This a hymn filled with joy,

6 A hymn inspired by the Holy Spirit,

7 The first hymn in honor of Mary, and it's in the Gospel!

8 It's the very first blessing in the Gospel: "Blessed are you among all women and blessed is the fruit of your womb."

9 This is a blessing for the mother and her son. They're so united that they share in it.

10 This is also the first beatitude in the Gospel: "Blessed are you who have believed!"

11 The first time Mary's son is called Lord, in fact, "my Lord," typical cry of a Christian.

12 The first time that Mary is called "The Mother of the Lord."

Let us, too, enter into this first act of devotion to the Mother of the Lord. *Hail Mary...*

Let us pray for the joy of all mothers and the honor of their children. *Hail Mary...*

Let us pray to the Spirit to fill our hearts so that we may sing out to the Mother of our Lord with the same enthusiasm demonstrated by Elizabeth. *Hail Mary...*

4. A hymn of the Mother of God

Mary, who has just been praised, gives all the glory to God and presents herself in the same light as all the poor and humble among her people.

She and her son are finally united, in fulfillment of the blessing that God promised to Abraham.

Her hymn, *My Soul Magnifies the Lord*, (the Magnificat), traverses the entire history of her people, from Abraham to her son Jesus.

It traces God's faithfulness step by step; He is faithful from generation to generation.

Every time we join with Mary in singing her Magnificat we remember our God, humble people everywhere, those suffering from famine, refugees, and all mothers who, like Mary, are awaiting the birth of their child.

The Magnificat (version chosen by the prayer leader)

5. Hymn to children

Zachariah's hymn continues Mary's Magnificat.

It is a hymn of praise to God and he dedicates the second part to the two children:

First of all, to his son, the Baptizer,
Set to become the prophet of the Most High
Intent on preparing the way of the Lord,
Letting the Lord's people know that they are saved,
And that the Lord's mercy is in our midst.

Then to the second child, the Most High,
The Lord, God of Israel
Coming to walk among his people;
He is the one with the power to save us,
Freeing us from the hands of the enemy;
The sun
coming to illumine those living in the shadows
And lead our steps along the path of peace.

Let us pray to the Lord to bless our society with more and more respect for children and with the desire to treat them as Zachariah, Elizabeth and Mary did, so that each child will be welcomed as a prophet and son, a sibling of Jesus and child of God.

A moment of silence, followed by free petitions...

Conclusion

The hymns coming from Mary's visit to Elizabeth form a threesome in which God our Father and His son, our Messiah, reveal their Presence among us:

A mother's hymn to the Lord's Mother,
The Mother's hymn to God
And a father's hymn to the two children

Mary's mission is mightily human and mightily divine: two children are the salvation that materializes in human history. Joy and praise take center stage.



4-THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

JOHN, 4: 6-42

Mary, Mother of the Lord, we would like to welcome this moment of life and grace where your Son enters in such depth into the heart of the Samaritan woman and into the hearts of all Christians who read it with the desire to quench their thirst *with living water*.

S – Mary, you are a person accustomed to preserving the words and facts of you Son in her heart.

T – make us also men capable of intimacy with your Son.

S – Mary you spent long years with your Son,

T – help us to encounter Him to receive from Him "the water that will become in us the gushing source of eternal life."

S – May our lives dissolve so that we are not prevented from being surprised by your Son.

T – but that we allow Him a frank dialogue with us.

Alleluia! Alleluia!

1 – The Word of God has created the universe!

2 – The Word of God purifies our heart!

3 - The Word of God is the bread of believers!

4 – The Word of God is the flow of life!

Welcome to the Word.

Weary with walking, Jesus sat down quite simply at the edge of the well. It was around midday. There arrived a Samaritan woman to draw water. Jesus said to her: "Give me a drink"... But this woman who was a Samaritan, said to Him: "How can you, a Jew ask me, a Samaritan women, to drink with me?" In fact the Jews wanted to have nothing to do with the Samaritans.

Mary, your Son, initiated this dialogue . It bursts the ethnic, social and historical boundaries, it goes beyond bias...

And who is the person to whom he speaks?

A woman, in a society where men alone had influence;

A Samaritan, without worth in the eyes of the Jews;

A woman who has often been unlucky in love; all her loves are dead one after the other and the one she lives with now is not well.

A woman who comes to draw water in the middle of the day, alone, although other women, those of good families come in the cool of the morning.

A woman who finds herself at the bottom of the social ladder.

All alone before Jesus...

But without complexes and so prepared to dialogue

What is important for Jesus, is to touch the heart of a person so that she opens herself to the gift of God and know the Father.

Mary, we wish to praise your Son who breaks down the barriers we construct:

(Hymn, provided by the Facilitator)

Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: "If you knew the gift of God and who it is who says to you: "Give me a drink": it is you who would ask and he would give you living water."

S – Mary, we feel called by what your Son said: "If you knew the gift of God!"

T – This gift of God we have always to know it, to recognise it, to welcome in our amazed heart and always carry it in our hand.

S – Mary, let us become more attentive, more desirous, our hear more open when your Son says:

T – If you knew the gift of God and who is speaking to you.”

S – Mary, we think we know the gift of God and know that it is Jesus, the Messiah, the Saviour, your Son who speaks to us.

T – And yet we should empty our hearts, make it new for the welcome for the knowledge of your Son and the opening to Him are always new, always surprising.

(Hymn provided by the Facilitator).

The woman said to him: “Lord, you haven’t even a bucket and the well is deep. Where do you therefore get this water of life?”...

Jesus replies to her: “Whoever drinks of this water will still thirst; but the one who will drink of the water I give them will never thirst; on the contrary, the water that I will give him will become a gushing source of eternal life.”

The woman said to him: “Lord, give me this water so that I may no longer thirst and that I may no longer have to come here for water!”

S – Mary, we also are given drink in the desert of our lives and we are also in search of this source of living water which brings eternal life.

T – We also say to ourselves like the Samaritan woman: “Lord, Jesus, give me this water so that I may no longer thirst!”

S – Mary, he was born of you, the one who can give us living water, the water that gives eternal life.

T – Intercede, Mother of Jesus, so that in our soul may sing this living water, so that t we may feel this source of eternal life pour into us.

Mary, we as living water from your Son *the water which quenches our thirst.*

Mary we ask living water from your Son *the water in which we wash away our sins.*

Mary, we ask living water from your Son *the water that makes fertile our deserts.*

Mary, we ask living water from your Son *the water of baptism which makes us
Sons of God, brothers of Jesus.*

Mary, we ask living water from your Son *The Holy Spirit who can make of us
Disciples, apostles of your Son, as this
Samaritan woman would become.*

“Lord, says the woman, I know that you are a prophet. Our fathers have adored on this mountain, and you, you affirm that it is in Jerusalem that you must worship.”

Jesus said to her: “Believe me, woman, the time is coming where it will be neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem that you will adore the Father... True adorers will adore the Father in spirit and truth; such are, in effect, the adorers who search for the Father. God is spirit, and that is why those who adore him must adore him in spirit and truth.”

Mary, who wished to say your Son when he said “to worship in spirit and peace.?”

It is not the place which makes adoration, neither Mount Garizim, nor the Temple of Jerusalem, but the heart, the sincerity of the heart:

A heart broken and humiliated, you do not detest it...

You want sincerity in the depth of the heart...

Do not deprive me of your spirit, Lord,
preserve in me always your Holy Spirit.

(Let us sing three times a refrain linked with “a new heart”.)

The woman said to him: “I know that a Messiah must come – the one that is called Christ- When He will come, He will tell us all things.”

*Jesus says to her: “**I am He, the one who is speaking to you.**”..*

The woman then abandons her crutch, returns to the village and says to the folk : “Come therefore and see a man who has told me all that I have done. Could He not be the Christ?”

Mary, how can we react before all that which your Son Jesus, tells us: **“The Messiah is I who am speaking to you!”** *(Brief moment of silence...)*

Am I ready to announce the Christ as was the Samaritan woman?

Mary, faced with such a revelation, you responded:

“I am the servant of the Lord,

Be it done unto me according to the word of God!”

And all your life was undertaken in favour of the Messiah, without reserve and for always.

Here is how John Paul II responded:

“I love only You,
I am only Yours.
I search only for you
And I am ready to be submissive,
But to you alone,
Exercise power with justice.
And I, I desire
To be guided by You.
Lord,
Take me as I am, with my faults
and my limitation,
and have me become
what You desire
that I may be.

Let us conclude together with this prayer of Our Holy Father, Benedict XVI:

Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God,
You have given to the world the true light,
Jesus, your Son and the Son of God.
You are completely open
To his appeal
And you have thus become the source
Of the goodness which flows from him.
Show us Jesus
Lead us to Him.
Teach us to know Him
And to love him, so that we can,
We also,
Be capable of true love,
And become the source of living water
Amidst a thirsty world.
(Encyclical : God is Love).

Nicodemus

Jn 3, 1-21

We're quite familiar with this passage describing Nicodemus's nighttime visit to the Lord. It's a very intimate occasion and reveals so much. This narrative always has the power to move hearts.

Nicodemus is an influential man in his society.

A man of experience, well up in years
wealthy
learned
prominent
a Pharisee
member of the Sanhedrin
learned teacher in Israel



but especially, one uneasy about his relationship with this new teacher in Israel, Jesus, of whom it was said among the Pharisees, "You are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you are doing unless God is with him." He respects this teacher and one night, true to his feelings, he decides to pay him a visit.

With your heart, Mary, mother of this teacher whom people look upon with such high regard, the one who knows him best, we'd like to take in this narrative and pray over it; also with the upright heart of Nicodemus, given his esteem for this young Rabbi.

Leader Mary, mother of the Lord, who cherishes the words and deeds of Jesus in your heart,
All *help us to have a heart and mind that are open, humble and inviting.*

Leader Mary, mother of the Lord, you lived with Jesus for many long years, and often him all to yourself when your daily household chores were done,
All *grant our desire to meet your Son.*

Leader Mary, Mother of Jesus the Rabbi, whenever we have an opportunity to encounter your Son: at daybreak, at noon like the Samaritan woman, or at nightfall when he brings his peace to Nicodemus,
All *help our hearts to be attentive as intimacy is a propitious time for great revelations.*

Leader Mary, Nicodemus approached Jesus with esteem and simplicity of heart; then he knew how to grow silent and give Jesus all the time He needed to reveal His teachings,
All *May we also feel this esteem for your Son and know how to become still, keep our hearts in silence and at peace in order to listen to what YOUR Son is revealing.*

Song about God's love chosen by the prayer leader

The Gospel:

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

He came to Jesus at night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you are doing unless God is with him."

Jesus answered and said to him, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

Nicodemus said to him, "How can a person once grown old be born again? Surely he cannot reenter his mother's womb and be born again, can he?"

*Jesus answered, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and **Spirit**. What is born of the flesh is flesh and **what is born of spirit is spirit**. Do not be amazed that I told you, 'You must be born from above.' **The wind***

blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Nicodemus answered and said to him, “How can this happen?”

*Jesus answered and said to him, “You are the teacher of Israel and you do not understand this? Amen, amen, I say to you, we speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you people do not accept our testimony. If I tell you about earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, **so must the Son of Man be lifted up**, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”*

***For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son** so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.*

Let us take some time to dwell on this passage in silence... then share our reflections on what it means to us.

Mary, this scene presents many similarities with the Annunciation. You too said to Gabriel, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?”

And Nicodemus said, “How can a person once grown old be born again?”

Gabriel’s answer to Mary was, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you...”

And Jesus answered and said to Nicodemus: “No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit.”

Mary, when the Spirit overshadowed you, you gave birth to *the King of Kings*.

When the Spirit overshadows us, we are born as *sons in His Kingdom*.

Mary, we ask you to have the Spirit overshadow our lives so that *the son of the Kingdom and the brother of the King* will be born in our lives.

Let us take a moment of silence... then recite three Hail Marys

Mary, at the Annunciation you received a great revelation about the identity of the child whom you were going to bear:

“He will be great,
Called son of the Most High,
King forever;
The one to be born will be holy,
He will be called the son of God.”

You took this in with your prayerful mind, accustomed to being in God’s presence.

You took Gabriel at his word, “Nothing is impossible for God!”

Nicodemus too received a whole set of revelations:

That the Son of man would be raised up,
Die and be reborn, (rise)
To draw all men and women to Himself,
In order to give the Holy Spirit to all who look upon Him.

And above all, the great revelation of God’s love:

“For God so loved the world
That he gave his only Son
So that everyone who believes in him
Might not perish but have eternal life.
For God did not send his Son into the world
To condemn the world,
But that the world might be saved through him.”

A moment of silence...

Mary, faced with this revelation from God and the child who offered himself to you, you showed yourself entirely ready to do their will:

“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord,
May it be done to me according to your word!”

You turned yourself into a mother, into love and a font of wisdom for your child.
You placed the child at the center of your life, all you held dear and your sorrows.
Then, when your Son was raised on high, he poured out his Spirit on you and his beloved disciple and you became everyone’s mother, our Mother.

We don’t know what Nicodemus said but he did put himself on the side of Jesus, defended him before the Sanhedrin.
And when the Lord died, took care of his burial, supplying 30 kilos of perfume to embalm his body. (Judas, the one who showed Jesus no love, pocketed 30 pieces of silver to betray him. Nicodemus, the one who showed him his love, donated 30 kilos of perfume!)

Truly, how can anyone be indifferent when confronting this revelation of God’s love?

“For God has so loved all people
That he gave his only Son!”

Mary, we have been blessed to receive the only Son of God, your only Son. Show us how to be loving and grateful so that this only Son, Jesus, will become the center of our lives, all that we treasure and all our joys and sorrows, too!

Let us take a moment of silence to converse with Mary and Jesus.

Then let us spontaneously express our petitions

Concluding song (chosen by the prayer leader)

6-“PETER, DO YOU LOVE ME?”

John, 21, 15-17

A situation unique in Scriptures that a God takes aside a man and in this intimacy asks him: “Simon, do you love me?” That never happened with Abraham, nor Moses, David nor any prophet... And what is strange, this question goes to the heart of each disciple, each of us feel ourselves questioned; Jesus takes us apart for a moment and asks us: “Do you love me?”

HYMN (provided by the facilitator)

Mary, we want to put ourselves in your company and with your heart accustomed to working out the meaning of things fill us with this climate of intimacy in which grows the seed of love, allow the question of Jesus: “..do you love me?” may we delve deep then rise up in our lives. May we be able to conclude with Peter by saying: “Lord, you know all, you know the limits of my heart, but you know that I love you!”

REFRAIN (provided by the facilitator)

Night has fallen on Lake Tiberias but the nets in the boat are empty. Someone on the lake edge says to throw out the nets again on the right.

Thrown out they become heavy, heavy with 153 large fish .”It is the Lord!” says the beloved apostle.

But it is Peter who plunges in to be the first to greet him.

There follows a strange morning repast.: bread and grilled fish. Decidedly, the Master loves to recognise his own from a repast.

Then he takes Peter apart for this unique, bewildering dialogue where the Shepherd sounds out the heart of the other shepherd,

To give him his whole task, for so much love is needed for this type of work to

Feed his sheep and lead his lambs

REFRAIN (provided by the facilitator)

Gospel: Jn 21, 15-17

“After the meal, Jesus said to Simon Peter: “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He replied: “Yes, Lord, you know very well that I love you” and Jesus then said: “Feed my lambs” A second time, Jesus said to him: “Simon, son of John do you love me?” He replied: “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him “Be the shepherd of my sheep.” A third time he said: “Simon, son of John do you love me?” Peter was sad that Jesus had asked him three times: “Do you love me?” and he replied: “Lord, you who know all things you know very well that I love you.” And Jesus said to him: “Feed my shepherd...”

A moment of silence so that each of us may also give our own response.

HYMN (provided by the facilitator)

THE REPLY OF THE SAINTS.

All the saints have heard resound in their hearts the demand of Jesus

“Do you love me

- 1 - Paul answered him: “It is no longer I that live,, it is you who live within me!... Who can separate me from your love, Lord?” (Gal, 2,20; Rom 8, 35).
- 2 - Mother Teresa has a long poem to say that Jesus is the sick under all their forms but also:

“Jesus is my God, my Lord, my Spouse,
 My All, my Treasure My Only One.
 Jesus is the only one in whom I besotted.
 To whom I belong
 And from whom nothing will separate me.
 He is mine and I am His.”

3 - Br. Basilio writes a long lyrical prayer:

“Yes, Jesus, I wish, I desire to love you more and more. I wish to love you without measure, with all my strength, with an intense, generous and true, with a passionate love. I wish that my life may be a cry of love towards you who are my all...” And he found his ideal: “Burn my life for Christ!”

A moment of silence, then the hymn:

HYMN (provided by the Facilitator)

MARY, the day of the Annunciation, you certainly heard this question asked of your heart: “Mary, do you love me?” And you replied: “I am the servant of the Lord...” To your child you would give all your love as a mother, all the joy that you sing in the Magnificat, all the youth of your life. You recenter (refocus) everything on you Son.

You welcomed Jesus,
 You bore Jesus,
 You named Jesus,
 You presented Jesus,
 ,
 You presented Jesus,
 You looked for Jesus,
 You suffered for Jesus
 You directed (people) towards Jesus
 You placed Jesus at the centre,
 You revealed Jesus,
 You were faithful to Jesus,
 You prayed with the Church of Jesus
 You stood at the foot of Jesus’ Cross
 You are the servant of Jesus,
 The Mother of Jesus,
 The disciple of Jesus

A moment of silence, then the hymn (provided by the Facilitator).

Why does Jesus ask us to love Him?

1 Because “god is love!” (1 Jn, 4,8)

ALL: *We believe, our God, that you are love without limits.*

2 Because “God has so much loved the world that He gave it His only Son

ALL: *We thank you God, for the gift of your well-beloved*

3 “Because there is no love greater than to give his life for those whom he loves

ALL: *and these he loves right up until the end” (Jn 15, 13 and 13,1)*

4 Because “the Good Shepherd knows his flock and calls them each by name

ALL: *and for them he gives his life.” (Jn 10, 3 and 14-15).*

4 because every day he provides bread for us.

ALL: *and blood changed for the salvation of all. (Lk. 22, 19-2)*

5 because he was born of Mary, He is born our brother,

ALL: *Son of the Virgin, the Emmanuel who sets us on our paths. (Mt 1,23 –Lk., 24, 13-36.*

6 Because on the cross he gave to us his mother: “Woman, behold your son!”

ALL: *and because he gave us his mother: “Here is your mother!” (Jn 19, 25-27)*

Moment of silence then:

REFRAIN (to be provided by the facilitator)

Love and Mission

Jesus asks love but for mission: feed the sheep , lead the lambs

Love towards the Master becomes life for men; the contemplation of the morning shows in the creation during the day..

1. Mary educate us in real love towards your Son: *Hail Mary..*
2. Mary, lead us to the sources of love: the contemplated Word, the celebrated Eucharist, multiple service: *Hail Mary...*
3. Mary, teach us to nourish love: *Hail Mary*
4. Mary, in your hands is the mission you confided us: *Hail Mary.*
5. Mary, give us sensitivity towards our sheep: *Hail Mary...*
6. Mary, give us the wisdom to lead the mother sheep: *Hail Mary...*
7. Mary support our gaze on the Good Shepherd, who recognises his sheep, who carries the lambs in his heart, searches for the lost lambs and slowly leads the mother sheep: *Hail Mary.*

Optional intentions

FINAL HYMN (provided by the facilitator)

5-THE HEART, HEARTH OF PRAYER
Luke 2, 19 and 51.

Twice, in almost identical terms, Luke presents Mary thus: “Mary for her part, kept all these things, pondering on them in her heart” Luke 2, 19. “And his mother faithfully preserved these things in her heart.” Luke 2, 51. Like Mary, and with her, let us centre our prayer in our hearts..

(Insert a chant/hymn to Mary, 1st part)

Mary is present as the woman who preserves and meditates in her heart all that happens to her Son. The heart, in the Bible, is the best part of a person, like its sanctuary, there where it is true; there where God is present. It is in the heart that Mary prays by carefully preserving all that which her Son said. To preserve in the heart is a long, day to day action, which characterises a person who lives within herself. We find Mary in this state on Christmas Day and twelve years later, when Jesus is lost in the Temple. It is a habit of Mary
(A moment of silence to re-read this passage personally... then we say three Hail Marys)

(Insert a chant/hymn to Mary, 2nd part).

What does she preserve faithfully with care in her heart? There are all the messages which have come to her and enlighten her regarding Jesus. All that Gabriel says to her, then Elisabeth, the angels, shepherds, Siméon and Anna, and Jesus’ own reply: “*Do you not know I need to be about my Father’s business?*” Mary is constantly evangelised by others. All this she meditates on, intensifies, prays, and comes in herself to a clearer and clearer vision of her Son. She does not know what it all means: what Siméon says about the child, what Jesus, a young adolescent, answers. But she has the beautiful attitude of one who believes: she puts that in her heart where in prayer, light will someday come. *(A moment of silence to personally re-read this passage ... then we will say three Hail Marys).*

(Insert a chant/hymn to Mary, 3rd. part).

In joy and in pain, Mary knew how to gather together all things in her heart, to preserve them in prayer and in the intellectual effort to understand them... This woman who keeps everything in her heart, we admire; we find a woman of great depth in whom reigns peace, reflection and that silent prayer which is called contemplation. We can say that this way of prayer is Mary’s usual style.
(A moment of silence to personally re-read this passage – then we will say three Hail Marys)

Preface

Here is how the Preface of the Immaculate Heart of Mary sees the Heart of our Mother;
(Read first of all in private, then in two choirs...)

Truly it is right and just to render you glory,
 To offer you our thanksgiving,
 Always and in every place, to you, Father most holy,
 God eternal and all-powerful,
 Through Christ, Our Lord.

For you have given to the Virgin Mary
A heart wise and obedient
 So that she may perfectly accomplish Your will;

A heart fresh and gentle
 On which you can engraven the law of the new Alliance;

A heart simple and pure,
 So that she can conceive your Son in her virginity

And see you forever;

A heart firm and watchful

To support without weakness the sword of sorrow

And await with faith the resurrection of your Son.

(Let us take some time to echo either some texts, or the Preface...

Then we will conclude by singing the Sanctus..)

This is why, with the angels of Heaven, we wish to bless you and acclaim you by singing in one voice: Holy!...

2. The Heart of the Son in two pictures

1. Jesus invites us into His Heart:

At this time, Jesus spoke and said: "I praise you, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, for having hidden this from the wise and the intelligent and having revealed it to little ones. Yes, Father, it is that you have planned in your benevolence. All has been given me by my Father. Nothing is known to the Son if it has not come from the Father, and nothing is known by the Father save through the Son and the one to whom clearly wishes it revealed.

Come to me, you who groan under the weight of sorrow and I will give you rest

Take on you my yoke and put yourself under my wings, **for I am gentle and humble of heart** and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke easy and my burden light. *(Moment of silence...)*

- Jesus is gentle and humble of heart,
- The Father reveals the Son to little ones,
- The Son reveals the Father to little ones

(A Hymn adapted to the theme)

2. The Open Heart

Having reached Jesus, they noted that he was already dead, and so they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers, with a blow from his lance, struck him in the side and immediately there came forth blood and water.

One who saw this has borne witness and his witness is confirmed to the truth and moreover this one knows that what he says is true so that you to might believe. *(Moment of silence...)*

- The last image of Jesus is an open heart... A very clear image of what God is: an open heart..
- The last image of Jesus, an empty heart...because he has given his all, because he is the total gift, because God is always the total gift.
- His own he loves right to the end.
- His own he loves right to the piercing of his heart.

(A hymn adapted to the theme)

3. The heart of the man

The prophet Jeremiah says that nothing is more false than the heart of man.

For Pascal the heart of man is like a drain (sewer)... in it dwells love and hate, life and death.

Jesus draws our attention also: "It is from the heart of man that comes all kinds of wickedness..."

By experience we know that our heart has been of being cured. This is exactly what God wants, "he who forms the heart of each..."

And the prophet Ezekiel makes this beautiful promise on behalf of God: "I will dare to take from you your heart of stone and I will put there a heart of flesh... I will give you my spirit.."

"Mary inspired in the first Marists a new way of being Church... This Marial Church has the heart of a mother: no-one is abandoned. A mother believes in the goodness of heart of a person..." (*AdR, 114*)

Let us here open our prayers of intercession to ask "*for new hearts for a new world*":

*Give us, Lord, new hearts,
Put in us, Lord, a new spirit.*

Conclusion:

Let us conclude with a hymn that tells us our Mother has her heart in her hand.

(Sing to Mary)

6-Identity of Mary

To say that the priest is the man of Christ and of the Church is to indicate points of contact, of convergence with the Virgin Mary: she too is all of Jesus; she too has some very particular ties of mother and member of the Church.

1-Mary and Jesus

It is clear that Mary only enters the story of salvation when she is asked to be the Mother of the Messiah. From the Annunciation and from her yes which dedicates her to the child, Mary is going to find a place in all the fullness of the life of the Son up to making her way into the mystery of the Church...

Mary has no sense that through Jesus, through a maternal service regarding Jesus, a motherhood which means love, time, intelligence, education, patience, suffering... and which covers the fullness of the human life of Jesus (John: Cana and the Cross) and not only the period of his childhood.

2-Mary and the Church

The ties here do not impose themselves with the evident force of the maternal ties with Jesus.

1-It's necessary to wait for the moment of Calvary, the moment of the gift of the mother, who is given to all the disciples of the Lord, but more obviously to someone who will be a priest in the Church of the beginnings...

2-But also thinking that it is from Christ which comes all new humanity, and carrying the Son at her breast, in fact Mary was carrying in her all the people of God who were going to be born from the Son.

On November 21, 1964, during the course of the closing Mass of the third session of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI proclaimed the Virgin Mary "Mother of all the Church," that is to say of all the Christian people, the faithful and the pastors who call her "Mother most loving" and he decided that "from now onward the whole Christian people should give even greater honor to the Mother of God under this most loving title." In fact this decision closed Vatican II. For Paul VI, it was a solemn gesture, which allows to be understood who he made even more worthwhile this truth: Mary, Mother of the Church. In fact this decision joins itself to the word of the dying Lord: "Woman, behold your son... Here, your mother." It is the Lord who in his love opens to us the doors of his family and gives us a common Father and Mother. And this also recalls what St. Paul says in Galatians 4: 4-5: "When the completion of the time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born a subject of the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law, so that we could receive adoption as sons."

Preface - Mary, Mother of the Church

...

Father, all-powerful and ever-living God,
we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks;
we especially praise you and proclaim your glory
as we honor the Blessed Virgin Mary.
*She received your Word in purity of her heart
and, conceiving in her virgin womb,
gave birth to our Savior
and so nurtured the Church at it's very beginning.
She accepted God's parting gift of love
as she stood beneath the Cross*

*and so became the mother of all those
who were brought to life
through the death of her only Son.*

She joined her prayers with those of the apostles,
as together they awaited the coming of your Spirit,
and so became the perfect pattern of the Church at prayer.

*Raised to the glory of heaven,
she cares for the pilgrim Church with a mother's love,
following its progress homeward
until the day of the Lord dawns in splendor.*

The preface of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception says that "Mary is the sign of the beginnings of the Church, spouse of the Christ without stain or sin, resplendent in beauty."

3-The Church looks at Mary

The Church has always understood that Mary is the anticipation of itself, a prophetic reality of the people of God; Mary is the mirror in which the Church finds its identity:

- To the Yes of Mary the yes of the Church must follow,
- To the mission of Mary, the mission of the Church
- To the maternity of Mary, the maternity of the Church
- To the passion of Mary at Calvary, the unending passion of the Church: "The Church has never taken off the red robe of the martyr!" (Cardinal José Saraiva Martins.)
- To the total gift of Mary to Jesus, the total gift of the Church to its Lord.
- Like Mary nourished Jesus, thus the Church nourishes the Body of Christ,
- Like Mary taught Jesus to walk, thus the church for the faithful.

*If Mary had never loved Jesus
would we have known Love?*

*If she had not told him words of peace,
would we have understood the Word of God?*

*If she had not nourished her baby with her milk,
would we share, today, the Bread of Life?*

*If she had not supported the first steps of Jesus,
would we walk to day on the Road of Life?*

*And if she had not taught him human wisdom,
would we be enlightened by the Wisdom from on High?*

Then there is the reciprocal presence of the two mothers: Mary-Church at the cenacle; Mary-Church in the Gospel of John... A reality which continues today... The Church is the one that welcomes Mary, as a treasure, as a mother.

9-The True Treasure

Above all others, the Lord Jesus creates unity among Christians. Every real Christian accepts Jesus as God, Son of God born of the Virgin Mary, Savior, Lord and Messiah, sole Mediator, give of a salvation so complete as to need no other person to complete it.

Yet Christ wishes us to collaborate with him. It gives him pleasure to say to us, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” He ever invites workers into his vineyard. That God accomplishes all things and yet invites us to collaborate with him is indeed extraordinary.

« In the fullness of time, » the time of salvation, Mary is the *first* to place herself at the service of Jesus. By er way of doing so, she becomes his servant and his mother, his teacher and his disciple, one consecrated *to* him, one consecrated *by* him to live within Church. Mary deserves our thanks, admiration, imitation. By placing herself fully at the service of Jesus, Mary becomes a model for all Christians. She becomes a unifying presence for all Christians, because we should resemble her and because she encourages us to be dedicated to the service of her son.

You may examine the way Mary is perceived in the two parallel poetic pieces:

Mary,

You welcome Jesus,
 You carry Jesus
 You name Him
 You present Jesus
 You protect Him,
 You search for Him,
 You suffer for Him,
 You lead to Jesus,
 You place Jesus at the centre,
 You reveal Him,
 You are faithful to Him,
 You stand at the foot of Jesus' Cross,
 You pray with the early Church of Jesus,
 You are Jesus' servant,
 Jesus' Mother
 and Jesus' disciple.

Mary,

you welcomed Jesus,
 you carried him,
 gave,
 presented
 sought.

For Him you were
 a woman of faith

a courageous woman
a bosom that welcomed and protected,
time,
intelligence,
a mother,
an educator,
the first disciple,
open to his mystery,
open to his cross,
both member and mother of the Church.

You made Him
your centre,
your treasure,
the life of your life,
the beloved Son,
the absolute Lord,
God,
in our fragile flesh.

10-Mary, As a global point of view - 1

We must not be deceived by the title. It is not that Mary is the centre, but that by relating her in the Scriptures we can look towards Jesus, the Trinity, the Church, to discover the nature of man, women, salvation. Mary is always situated in a context ; a Mariology which would fix the regard solely on Mary would have every chance of being a false and useless work.

Mary is a person of relations: remaining in her company is certain to give one the opportunity of meeting her Son, the plan of God's salvation, the Church which looks at it, presents it in the Scriptures, man in his loves, in his needs and in his long history. It is impossible to focus on the Virgin Mary and develop a reflection on her without her not assuming a tinge of Christology, ecclesiology, anthropology, without her not being caught up in the web of Scriptures. Looking at Mary does not isolate, on the contrary she is a person at the crossroads where converge the highways of life.

To frequent Mary is not necessarily to make of her the first person or the centre. Very often in her company it happens that Jesus appears to us more real, closer, surprising in the links he has created with her and us. In a Marian climate, it is possible to develop a deeply anthropological reflection, we will discover the importance that we hold in the eyes of God to the point that a woman among us, in her freedom, can weave bonds of maternity of life, and love for them. God desires all this. In the freedom of the young Mary, we will discover the boldness possible in our own freedom; in the grace that is bestowed on the mother, we read the plan of God for each of us.. It is exactly when Mary asks to speak with Jesus that he replies to her: "Who is my mother...? All those who do the will of my Father, these are for me brothers and sisters and mothers!" The privilege of the mother is put at the disposition of all; her prerogative becomes ours ; in the eyes of God, we are for him brothers, sisters, mothers.. In Mary we read the greatness of mankind.

Mary is a woman, in her is to be found the great richness of human nature: fullness of intelligence, of adventure into the unknown, fullness of giving birth and defending life, of enveloping it with love, faithfulness and responsibility. All women can say with Mary of their children : "You are the bone of my bone and the flesh of my flesh." All women share with Mary "the sword" which hangs over the son and which also transpierces the mother. Fidelity of the woman when destiny is contrary: "Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary wife of Cleophas and Mary of Magdala." The evangelist only listed the women when the tragedy of the Son was being consummated. Jesus still called his mother "woman", which had been the first name that Adam had called Eve. Mary is the mirror of rich feminine nature : she is virgin, spouse, mother, member of a family, humble servant whom all generations have called blessed. The human adventure is a constant dialogue between man and woman. History is always masculine and feminine since God has created man and women in his own image and resemblance. In Jesus is resplendent the true image of God, in Mary the resemblance.. All history re-centres itself in Jesus and Mary, the new man and the new woman.

The Church also says that she finds herself in the Virgin Mary. She recognises herself as spouse, mother and missionary. Since she was born, the Church has always been found at the foot of the Cross: persecutions and martyrs have never been lacking. The joys and sorrows of Mary are also the joys and sorrows of the Church; the graces of the mother of the Lord overflow on the Church. As the pride of the Virgin is totally in her Son, thus the Church finds all her pride in her Lord. The Church is proud of her Lord, joyful at the birth of its children, glorifying in its saints, pained by our sins, often scorned when she announces the Lord. The Church implores Mary, sings her praises, and looks at her as in a mirror. A faithful one who is familiar with the Virgin Mary, knows the Church better and loves her more.

**11-Mary,
As a global point of view - 2**

Mary is especially indicated for knowing her Son. In her company we look at him with the eyes of a mother, we learn to welcome him with a maternal heart. With Mary we make ourselves attentive to the titles which are given to the child and which define his identity. The day of the Annunciation the angel gives the following description of the child whose name is Jesus : “He will be great, son of the Most High, son of David, King of Kings, King for always, holy Son of God.” Mary receives the message, word full of the identity of the child. She and us, we make ourselves the servants of this Word. Then Mary sets out with the child who is forming within her; it is the first time that Jesus is carried on the paths of men, the first Christian mission. In the great encounter of the Visitation, Mary’s child receives the title of Lord, with that possessive adjective that is full of love “my Lord.” The day of Christmas, Jesus was the first born, the Saviour, Christ, joy for many, glory of God, and peace for us men. At the Presentation in the Temple and while he is in the arms of His Mother, the child has bestowed on him the most prestigious of titles: he is the child, the first-born, the salvation prepared for the nations, the Messiah of the Lord, the light of Nations, the glory of Israel, the sign of contradiction.

When we study the passages of the Gospel where Mary is present, we will always meet the Son as well. But the mother is present because of the Son. Looking at his relations with his mother, we will understand what kind of relationship Jesus wants with us. Mary and Jesus are two people who regard and reflect each other.

Mary is a person of many contacts and many loves. In her speaks God, the Trinity, Jesus, the Lord, the Church, man, woman, the family, her spouse Joseph. She is the woman. She is the woman whose heart is the sanctuary of the word, place of meditation: the Scriptures are welcomed, accomplished; she makes ready for us her maternal affection so we can understand what the redemption is.

The Magnificat of the Virgin roots us in the mercy of God who envelopes all the generations of his people beginning with Abraham, and she announces the blessings of the Son. In her can be seen the past, the present and the future of the Daughter of Israel, in her begins the new family of Jesus, the Church. Mary is a global point of view, and what comes from her that we contemplate is also exalted. At the same time, she remains “the servant of the Lord”. The mother-servant of the Church, the mother servant of all humanity, our mother.

**12-The woman
in the completion of time
Galatians 4:4-7**

“... in the completion of time, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born a subject to the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law, so that we could receive adoption as sons. As you are sons, God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son crying, ‘Abba, Father’; and so you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir, by God’s own act” (Gal 4:4-7).

Scholars generally agree that the letter to the Galatians was probably written at Ephesus in the year 54 during Paul’s third missionary journey (52-57) and that therefore this citation therefore, historically, is the first textual reference to Mary.

To be sure that his readers understood that Jesus was truly human, Paul emphasised that he had been born of a woman. It was not necessary for him to record her name, but he could not leave aside the participation of Mary when discussing the incarnation of her Son; it was He who brought us salvation and raised us to the dignity of sons.

More to the point is Paul’s use of the chiasmic structure in presenting this text; this is a literary device not uncommon in the New Testament which builds the text in the shape of a U, having symmetrical parts linked to each other by words or persons in the two parts. These symmetrical parts shed light on each other.

In the diagram above it is easy to see how the various parts are linked to each other. The text makes us understand that while Jesus is born of the woman, we are born as sons of God. There is a causal link: the birth of Jesus allows us to be born as sons of God. While Mary was chosen to be the mother of the Son, we were chosen to be sons of God, bearing within us the same Spirit of Jesus and being able, like him, to cry, “Abba, Father!”

Note the two parts of the chiasm: the descending part is made up of those who are involved in our salvation, God, the Father, the Son and the woman who welcomed him, the ascending part including those who have been saved and are now filled with the Holy Spirit, that is, all those who were subjects of the Law:

Ourself: “to be granted filial adoption”;

Yourselves: “The proof that you are sons is that God has sent into your hearts the Spirit of his Son who cries, “Abba, Father!”

You: “and so you are no longer a slave, but a son, and therefore an heir by God’s own act.”

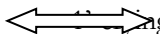
This is clearly a Trinitarian text, emphasising the complimentary actions of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

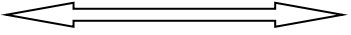
This freely given salvation was made possible because, at the completion of time, the Son was born of the woman Mary.

The links made with Jesus who saves us are so strong that we can positively assert that we form part of the same family. First, we have the same father; then, the same Spirit that dwells in the Son lives in us. Jesus is our brother, and we have the same mother.

In the writings of Martin Luther, we find this unreserved assertion: “Thanks to God’s abundant love, the believer can take pride in having Mary for his mother, Christ as his brother, and God as his Father.” And he adds, “Mary is the mother of the Church, of which she is the most eminent member. She is the mother of the Church for all ages since she is the mother of all the children who will be born of the Holy Spirit” (M. Luther, WA 10-1, 72.19-73, 2eWA 4, 234.5-8).

Symmetrical parts of the chiasm:

1-“... in the completion of time,  ag, ‘Abba, Father’
God (the Father)

2-sent his Son,  2’-As you are sons, God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son

3-born of a woman,  3’-so that we could receive adoption as sons.

4-born a subject to the Law,

4'-to redeem the subjects of the Law,

13-The Holy Spirit and Mary

Through her maternity, Mary is closely linked to the Son and this bond is the most obvious, the one which speaks most to our hearts. She is for us the one who holds Jesus either in her arms or in her heart: she is his monstrance, his throne, his sanctuary, his mother. This is the case in the Gospels, where she is called the mother of Jesus 28 times.

Yet there is a gift which precedes the child and makes it possible: this is the gift of the Spirit: « The Holy Spirit will come upon you!... And so the child will be holy and will be called the Son of God » (Lk 1:35). Matthew also informs us of this priority: « she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit » (Mt 1:18).

This gift of the Spirit to Mary, as God's presence preceding the incarnation of Jesus, reveals the divine logic: the Spirit preceded all the great moments of Life. Over the chaotic waters of the beginnings hovers the Spirit, and then there springs forth an organized plenitude of life (Gn 1: 2). The people of Israel is no more than a mass of dry bones, but the prophet calls the Spirit from the four corners of the earth. The bones take on sinews, flesh, skin, and rise up like an army of the living (Ez. 37). Mary is a virgin, but the Spirit will come upon her and from the virgin will be born the new man, Jesus. At Pentecost, in the cenacle, there is a group of disciples closed in on themselves. The Spirit comes down on them as power and as fire, and the Good News fills the streets of Jerusalem: it is the official birthday of the Church. The Eucharistic species consist of a little bread and wine, but once the Spirit comes upon them they are the body and blood of Christ present among us. It is the Spirit who stands at the threshold of all great transformations.

One may say that, starting with the Annunciation, the Spirit never leaves Mary. When she enters the house of Zachary, rich with the infant she carries, her greeting to Elisabeth makes the little John the Baptist leap with joy, and, filled with the Spirit, Elisabeth begins to prophesy and to weave the first great praises of the mother of God. The same, when Mary places her child in the arms of Simeon, the latter, filled with the Spirit, prophesies, glorifying the child « light of the nations and glory of Israel ». Finally, the final concerns of Jesus on the cross are for the mother and the disciple, first living cell of the Church. The last simultaneous presence of the Spirit and Mary is the day of Pentecost. But then, Mary the mother, yields place to the mother Church, and she blends into the community of the faithful.

When God makes a gift, he makes it forever, it becomes God's faithfulness. Over Mary there will always be the Spirit, with Mary there will always be the child. It was true yesterday, it is true today.

To go to Mary is to place ourselves in the ambiance of the Spirit. To stay with Mary is to have the chance of hearing for ourselves too: « The Holy Spirit will come upon you! » So we will have the chance of having Jesus become incarnate in our lives also.

14-I have no relations with a man

Lk 1,34

Mary's comprehensive question to the angel was, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" A challenging question for exegetes! What does the youthful Mary mean? Saint Augustine sees a vow of virginity prompting this question, reasoning that the announcement of the child's conception would raise doubts about that vow. Others view the question as simply a literary device to let Gabriel follow through in delivering his message, the question itself being devoid of meaning.

I share neither of these interpretations. If the young virgin had recalled a vow she had made, the glorious event of the Annunciation would have revolved around her, whereas it is the child who lies at the heart of this mystery. On the other hand, to me, saying that the youthful Mary's question is purely a literary device seems an easy way to avoid dealing with the profound significance of her question.

I, however, see Mary's words as truly a continuation of Gabriel's message. He was slowly revealing the various elements of the child's identity to the heart of this young virgin, looking her in the eyes while she hung on his every word. In that way a phenomenal bond developed between them. Let's try to imagine for a moment how carefully Gabriel presented his announcement and how the virgin attentively took in the full import of his message. Everything took place in an atmosphere of tranquil silence enabling the spoken word to fill Mary's heart. This is how I see the message:

1. "Do not be afraid, Mary" (silence and attentiveness)
2. "You have found favor with God" (silence and attentiveness)
3. "You will conceive in your womb" (silence and attentiveness)
4. "And bear a son" (silence and attentiveness)
5. "And you shall name him Jesus" (silence and attentiveness)
6. "He will be great" (silence and attentiveness)
7. "And will be called Son of the Most High" (silence and attentiveness)
8. "The Lord will give him the throne of David his father" (silence and attentiveness)
9. "He will rule over the house of Jacob forever" (silence and attentiveness)
10. "And of his kingdom there will be no end" (silence and attentiveness)

Mary is graced with time to let each aspect of the child's identity penetrate her mind and heart, allowing her to see that this is about a truly extraordinary child, above and beyond the realm of human understanding. The child is described in such majestic terms that the young virgin is struck with the sudden realization that "Jesus cannot be the son of a man for no man could sire such a son!" "I have no relations with a man" means: I don't know any man capable of begetting the child that you have announced. And so, how will this child come into being? When Mary says "I have no relations with a man," she effectively rules out a purely human means of conception, the role of a man and a woman is discarded. The question remains: given that this child's birth and name have been announced so assuredly, how is it possible for him to be born? It's beyond the power of a man to bring this about.

The angel proceeds to address this human impossibility and his message ends with these words: "Nothing will be impossible for God." He answers Mary with that deliberate cadence that enables her to take in the profound meaning of his words:

1. "The holy Spirit will come upon you" (silence and attentiveness)
2. "And the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (silence and attentiveness)
3. "Therefore the child to be born will be called holy" (silence and attentiveness)
4. "The Son of God" (silence and attentiveness)
5. "And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived ..." (silence and attentiveness)
6. "For nothing will be impossible for God" (silence and attentiveness)

With these carefully measured words, enabling the virgin's heart to encounter light and understanding, the journey has advanced from the extraordinary identity of the child, to the human impossibility of his conception, leading to the almighty power of God: "Nothing will be impossible for God."

Indeed, I believe that the mystery of the Annunciation was revealed in a slow and deliberate manner, enabling the youthful Mary's mind to welcome its grandeur, plumb its depths and express her generous and visionary yes.

In the presence of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Most High, Mary most likely perceived the child's identity; that Jesus, her son was the hoped-for Messiah.

The response of the youthful Mary emanates from this enlightenment and the affirmation of Gabriel: "Nothing will be impossible for God." This illumination and declaration form the setting for Mary's yes: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word."

15-A yes in the full light of day
(Lk 1: 26-38)

In the Annunciation event, Mary passed from deep trepidation to a yes given in the full light of day, with a conscience fully enlightened.

In fact, we find a young Mary concerned with understanding, so that she can give the right response. Mary appears as a person who reflects and is attentive, who lives within the sanctuary of the heart.

The greeting of Gabriel: "Rejoice, so highly favoured. The Lord is with you," is followed by profound dismay: "Mary was deeply disturbed by these words." But her interior strain, her disposition before the message, was an effort to understand it: "she asked herself what this greeting could mean."

Gabriel is essentially responding to this interior strain to understand. He tells Mary not to be afraid and then enlightens her: "You are to conceive and bear a son, and you will call him Jesus." We are in the immediate future tense, almost like a present, as if the conception had already commenced, as if Mary were unable to withdraw from this immense grace which is for her and for all humanity.

Then, with a leisurely rhythm, the angel goes on to disclose, drop by drop, the various elements of the child's identity, giving Mary time to listen, to integrate in her consciousness, to assimilate these aspects of light:

"He will be great,
and will be called Son of the Most High.
The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David;
he will rule over the House of Jacob forever,
and his reign will have no end."

Gabriel has given Mary time to accept, after successive illuminations, the spiritual profile of the child announced. Beato Angelico, in his Annunciations, always presents Mary with her face held towards Gabriel, in an immense attentive listening.

Mary's reply reveals how she has understood Gabriel, in the measure that the idea she has gained of the child is very correct: he will be born of woman and will be called Son of the Highest, he will inherit a kingship that embraces the fullness of time and space and will penetrate eternity. Her reply insists now on the how. It is another desire for interior light: "But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?" In the depths of her consciousness, Mary intuits that this child cannot come from a human love, cannot be the son of a man and a woman. The child announced is immeasurably greater, full of time and eternity, and his throne is the heart of all mortals. It is as if Mary said: "I do not know a man capable of giving me such a son; and so, how will this be done? How will human incapacity be overcome?"

The angel illuminates Mary's spiritual intelligence more deeply: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know that Elizabeth... for nothing is impossible to God."

Clear, serene, total light illumines the mind, heart, will of the young Mary: the child announced emerges into full light. This is how the painters of the Renaissance see it through their lenses on the Nativity: Jesus, source of light, casting light on those present and, above all, on Mary. The Virgin's yes: "I am the handmaid of the Lord; let what you have said be done to me," germinates in this light. Mary is pushed by this light and by the Holy Spirit to open herself totally to the child announced. And so is born in her a mother's love, a love without limits, a passionate love, the first love for Jesus.

In the Annunciation, light predominates; Mary pronounces her yes in the full light of day. This light is not an anticipated revelation of the future, but a knowledge of the will of God which is converted into the confidence and power of the yes. It is a vision of the child that contains in germ all that the evangelists, Paul, Peter, John, the author of the Apocalypse, will say about Jesus, the alpha and omega of the whole history of salvation.

The welcome the Virgin reserves for this child is the first budding of Christian faith, a faith full of love, the faith of the mother.

16-An enthusiastic yes

The Annunciation narrative ends with Mary's answer: "You see before you the Lord's servant; let it happen to me as you have said."

Coming down from heaven the wonderful gift of God's son is left in the hands of a young girl favoured by the Holy Spirit, the child taking shape at that very moment. We may ask, what was the nature of Mary's *Yes*?

The word **servant** is often underlines to emphasis Mary's humility, as, for example, in Mary's Magnificat: "*He has looked on the humbleness of his servant.*" Astonished to discover herself in the presence of God's majesty, Mary becomes aware of her nothingness. She situates herself among the crowd of the servants of God, Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets who looked for the coming of the great servant of God and humanity who will give his life for the ransom of the multitude (Mt 20:28, Lk 22:27).

At the same time, Mary understood the words of the angel, "*Full of grace*" – filled with God's love, beloved by God. Besides, she understood well the angel's words of assurance: "*Do not be afraid, Mary, the Lord is with you.*" Gabriel's invitation to rejoice and be wrapped in the love of God enlightened and comforted Mary's heart: she felt deeply loved.

It is worth mentioning that the way she answered, "*I am the servant ...*" was in those days one of the common formulas for pledging love and at marriage ceremonies. Ruth had used a similar formula when she said to Boaz, "... spread your covering on your maid" (Ruth 3:9). Abigail, upon being asked to marry David, answered, "Here is your maidservant, ready to serve you and wash the feet of my master's servants" (1 Sam 25:41). Ruth and Abigail answered by committing themselves completely to a human love, but Mary was the first one who dared to use a marriage formula with God. Indeed her reply was par excellence a loving answer to Love. It was the expression of her total commitment, of her readiness to serve the child she was receiving. In Mary, the covenant made by God with the people of Israel, reached its highest point, as foretold by the prophets: it was a covenant of married love. So, humility and love weave themselves into a cradle to welcome Jesus into Mary's heart.

Moreover, the second part of Mary's reply, "*let it be done to me according to thy word,*" is an expression of intense desire, of joy at receiving such an immense grace, as if saying, "Oh! Let what you have said come to be!" Her reply brings to mind Jeremiah, who devoured God's longed for words (Jer 15:16).

David had experienced a similar situation when he was told by the prophet Nathan: "The Lord is with you and he will build to you a house. I will be a father to your descendants, and these will be my sons. Your house and your royalty will last forever!" (2 Sam 7:3-25). Hearing that promise David prostrated himself and begged Yahweh to realise his word: "Keep your promise and do what you said!" At the annunciation all that the angel said of the child was for Mary an echo of Nathan's prophecy. Like David, she begged God to realise his words. Gladly, lovingly, she committed herself to God's plan of salvation.

At that moment something new and unique took place. The promised child began to take flesh within her, at the same time Son of the Father and Son of Mary, God and man. Through the action of the Holy Spirit this was a new beginning for all who would welcome Jesus: "To all those who received Him, he empowered them to become God's sons" (Jn 1:12). We are all children of the yes of Mary.

17-The Way of Acceptance

With the Annunciation, Mary opens the way of acceptance to the Lord. By her yes, Jesus is accepted for the first time by a human being, accepted in a total love. Mary opens a highway for humanity to accept God himself.

This acceptance will be repeated constantly in the people of God, in all centuries, in all cultures, in all times. Already in the gospel, after Mary there is Joseph with a similar readiness, then the family of the little John the Baptist with singing and joy, then quietly the shepherds; the Magi end their long journey on their knees before the new born King of the Jews. At the threshold of the Temple there is the astonished and prophetic joy of the aged Simeon who takes the child in his arms: « the Light of the nations and the glory of your people Israel», and of the elderly Anne who hurries to proclaim to all the deliverance of Jerusalem.

Peter too receives the glance of Jesus and weeps bitterly. Yet Peter's ultimate response to Jesus is the words, "You know that I love you." Zacchaeus will welcome Jesus with great joy and with a total reform of his life. Lazarus and his sisters welcome Jesus into their home as a friend. The sinful woman pours precious nard upon the feet of Jesus. The Good Thief stakes his death and his life upon the death and life of Jesus: "Jesus, remember me . . ." The Beloved Disciple welcomes into his home the mother of Jesus; and Joseph of Arimathaea places in his own new tomb the body of Jesus. The disciples of Emmaus say to the resurrected Jesus: Stay with us Lord, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over. Paul makes bold to say, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?"

This is a passionate acceptance which runs through the whole history of the Church to reach us with John Paul II, with Mother Teresa, with Bishop Romero and those who over the years have given their lives for Christ. Salvation travels from yes to yes, from hardships to fidelity. Since the time when Mary first welcomed her son, welcoming arms have every remained open to him. The Church has never forsaken the white tunic of the bride who accepts the bridegroom and cries out to him, « Come, Lord Jesus! » It is the « Yes » of Mary that has opened up this wide and spacious road of love.

And today thousands of people, thousands of *young* people are searching for the Lord, are welcoming him, are following the Way of the Cross, are bearing their own crosses, are announcing his Resurrection, are pronouncing their "Yes" to the Lord. Mary's "Yes" bears its fruit in those spoken today. A French song puts it this way, «All that is most precious in your love remains forever hidden in our harvests.»

18-Take Mary into your home

An angel invites Joseph, the just man, the son of David, to take Mary into his home. This is a young woman he loves with all his heart, one filled with grace and splendor and, according to St. Luke, a virgin yet now his wife. But, as the angel says, the young woman he is welcoming is much more than simply one filled with grace. She is also a mother, bearing within herself the Son of God. Joseph is being invited to welcome this gift from the Holy Spirit.

His human love for the young woman now draws him into the history of salvation. His becomes a love that no longer simply involves a marital relationship between him and Mary but one centered on Jesus and rooted in the nature of Divine Love. Joseph is the second person in the world to welcome the Son that has been given to us and to dedicate his life to serving Him. Yet to this second person welcoming Jesus, the Son of God, the angel says, “Take Mary into your home.” Not just this Son, but Mary too.

With his openhearted welcome Joseph becomes the ideal for every true Christian and the Church: “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her.” (Mt 1, 20) The Church too welcomes Mary as bearer of the Son of God for us. Not just Jesus, but His Mother – “Take Mary into your home.”

The Beloved Disciple in John’s Gospel will experience a similar situation when Jesus entrusts him with the care of His Mother. The Evangelist writes, “And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.” (Jn 19, 27) During the earliest days of Jesus’s presence on earth Joseph is the man who welcomes Him. As He is about to die, the Beloved Disciple is the one to open his arms and heart. Here we have two situations that serve to include the entire span of Jesus’s earthly life. Both times Mary is there, being welcomed. Yet Mary is also an image of the Church. “Do not be afraid to take Mary into your home” – these are words addressed to every disciple. “Do not be afraid to welcome the Church into your home. Like Mary she is also bearing Christ. She too is a mother nurturing the work of the Holy Spirit.”

Beginning with Joseph taking “Mary into his home,” a steady stream of people welcome the Mother of the Lord into their lives, a phenomenon that might surprise us and bring solace to our prayer life. After Joseph, the preborn John the Baptizer and his family welcome Mary and her son. After that, The Magi bow down before the child on Mary’s lap. At the presentation in the

Temple Simeon embraces the child, but also speaks directly to his Mother, telling her that a sword will pierce her and she will share in the passion of her Son. As the Lord is about to die, He asks the Beloved Disciple to welcome Mary into his home as his mother. And finally the infant Church, together with the Mother of the Lord, prays while eagerly awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit. Over and over we see people welcoming our Mother, and in the two instances featured here, in John and Luke, Mary is welcomed by the infant Church. Mary, present at the heart of the Church, is the last image we have of her in Scripture.

This welcome always takes place in an atmosphere of love – what a joy it must have been for Joseph to take Mary into his home as his wife! What joy for the Beloved Disciple to take Mary into his home as his mother! This joy that comes from welcoming Mary as our Mother, so deserving of love, praise and thanks from every disciple, is found in the Church in every age. All true disciples of the Lord take Mary into their homes. Joseph has opened the door for us and shown us how to do this. Thanks, Joseph

In the mystery of the Incarnation, which especially catches our attention at Advent and Christmas, we rarely think of what we owe to Joseph.

In fact, his yes, his readiness to do what God asked him, to take in Mary and the child, smoothed the path of the Incarnation so that the mother was protected and the child had nothing to fear. On the contrary, he found the love of a family. The child was able to enjoy that balanced love provided by a father and a mother. Joseph's yes defused a dramatic situation, avoiding the mother's disgrace and possible stoning. Joseph's availability covers everything, his yes discretely cloaks the whole mystery. He guards the drama in the depths of his heart, in his integrity as a «just man» (Mt 1:19). The most extraordinary birth in history is vested in normality and Jesus has every chance of having the same life as any other child.

Joseph was « a just man » on three levels. With regard to the law, he wished to respect it, to the point of giving up his beautiful dream of love with the young Mary. But he was still more just towards persons, since he wished to respect and save Mary. Joseph lived his highest justice, however, in searching for the will of God: « What was God telling him through this pregnant Mary? » Joseph probably knew that God was at work in Mary, that she had become like the ark of God. No one could approach the ark of God, no one could take possession of it without being called to do so. God's ark was his exclusive possession.

Faced with this woman expecting a child, Joseph feels the need to withdraw from the scene. Whether he discovered her condition in a roundabout way or, as is more likely, Mary told him herself, he has two problems to confront. What role does he have in all this? And what is to be done to shield Mary from the inevitable judgments of family members and neighbours, and perhaps even worse consequences? An informal divorce appears to be the only, if unsatisfactory, option.

In sleep and dream the mystery is revealed to him, and the angel tells him what he must do: « Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife: the child she has conceived is from the Holy Spirit » (Mt 1: 20). Because Joseph was a « just man », accustomed to the ways of God, he knew how to read in the dream the divine will. Confronted with the evidence of this will, he makes himself totally disposable: « Joseph did what the Angel of the Lord had told him: he took his wife into his home... » (Mt 1: 24). Joseph abandons his own well-meaning but maladroit plans. He accepts Mary, he accepts her with her child. The way of salvation is smoothed out: Christmas can come, the public life, the passion, death, resurrection, Pentecost, the life of the Church. Joseph's yes catches up with our own spiritual adventure today.

Joseph's life now has a new centre: the child given. All his energies are put at the service of this child. He saves mother and child from Herod's executioners; he protects them on the road to exile. To both he assures affection and protection. To him falls the little boy's education: he introduces him to social life, initiates him in prayer, leads him to discover the world of love, teaches him his own craft so that Mark will call Jesus « the carpenter » (Mk 6: 3).

Joseph's yes leaves the yeses of Mary and Jesus free to bear their fruit. Jesus will be able to enter upon a normal social life: he will be a child of Israel and live the history of his people. From Joseph Jesus acquires a family, the family of David, and ancestors, many of whom were kings. It is from Joseph that he inherits the title of « Son of David » the title used by the blind, lepers, and all the poor people who call on him in expectation of healing: « Son of David, have pity on us » (Lk 18: 38-39). The title is also a Messianic one, pointing towards the true royalty of Jesus: « God will give him the throne of David, his father; he will reign over the house of Jacob and his reign will last forever! » (Lk 1 : 32-33). The title of King will be the last accorded Jesus. On the cross, the reason for his condemnation is: « Jesus, the Nazarean, King of the Jews! » (Jn 19: 19).

These are our reasons for saying thank you to Joseph, « the just man », the available man, the humble man, the man who built the family and saved it, the man who loved Mary, his wife and put his whole heart at the service of the child who was given him. Joseph also preserves a discreet presence in the two great Messianic titles of Jesus: « Son of David » and « King of the Jews! ». They were as passed on by him, given by him.

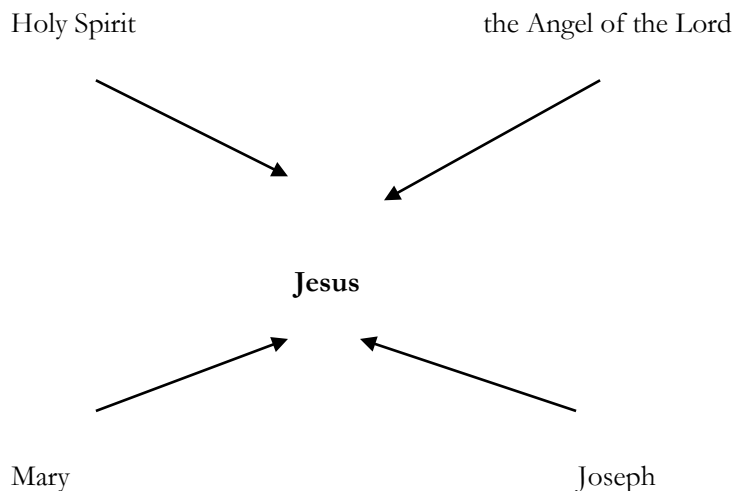
We owe no small thanks to Joseph.

19-Jesus freely given to Mary and Joseph

Given to a family

When we read verses 18-25 in the first Chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, an introduction to the ancestry of Jesus, we need to focus on the central role of the child and also the rich and compact text used to describe the other persons involved.

The passage begins, "Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about..." It's quite clear that everyone else will occupy a place around Jesus and serve him. Let's look at this way:



These verses in Matthew abound with references to humanity. What we have here is a genuine incarnation. Mary and Joseph are identified more than ten times, either by name or their respective pronouns. On the other hand, the Spirit and the Angel of the Lord are named only twice. This text shows Mary and Joseph working side by side as events unfold. From a human standpoint, they have starring roles in the Incarnation of Jesus.

As for the child, he is gratuitously given to Mary ever Virgin, and to Joseph, who welcomes him, not as the son from another man, but as this unique, extraordinary son, the handiwork of the Holy Spirit. Mary is informed about how the Spirit will overshadow her; Joseph learns that the son he is about to welcome is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The "Yes" given by both of them are spoken with reference to the same child.

Mary is taken aback by the Angel's message. It creates a moment of confusion in her mind; she sees no possible human explanation: "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" (Lk 1, 34) In other words, "The son you're talking about can't come about through human love." The Angel clears up Mary's confusion: "the holy Spirit will come upon you ...for nothing will be impossible for God." (Lk 1, 35, 37)

Mary's yes – "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word," (Lk 1, 38) – prepares the way for her son to come into the world. This, however, creates a new set of circumstances in Joseph's life. As a just man he's confused, seeing no valid way to resolve this mystery. The angel provides the solution, given from a higher realm: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her..." (Mt 1, 20) The son freely

given to Mary is also given in a completely gratuitous way to Joseph. Jesus is a gift freely bestowed on Mary, Joseph and all of humanity. Everyone one of us can welcome him but he cannot come to us through purely human means.

To contemplate how the situations of Mary and Joseph are comparable, let us analyze the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

Mary In Luke	Joseph In Matthew
A young woman, Joseph's wife.	A young man, Mary's husband
A virgin... who will conceive a son	The prophecy that a virgin will conceive a son is called to mind...
Full of grace	A just man
Daughter of Zion (The Lord is with her)	Son of David.
An Angel appears to her	An Angel appears to him
She struggles to understand what is happening	He goes through a period of confusion
The Angel says, "Do not be afraid, Mary..."	The Angel says, "Joseph, do not be afraid..."
Mary doesn't find a human explanation	Joseph doesn't find a logical answer...
God's messenger gives the explanation	God's messenger provides the answer
"The holy Spirit will come upon you..."	"It is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived..."
The Angel reveals the child's name: Jesus	The Angel reveals the child's name: Jesus
The Angel says, "You shall name him Jesus."	The Angel says, "You are to name him Jesus."
Mary expresses her willingness: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord..."	Joseph shows his willingness: "When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him..."
Through Mary, Jesus becomes a member of the People of God, Israel.	Through Joseph, Jesus becomes a member of the family of David, with a birthright to the titles of Son of David and King.
Mary, Jesus's mother, continues her life as Joseph's wife	Joseph, Jesus's father, continues his life as Mary's husband

All of this implies that the child has been born into a family. He has a mother and a father and will be the object of their profound love in an everyday family.

Starting out, Mary and Joseph loved each other directly – the woman full of grace loved the just man. That was already a most attractive and beautiful love. Now their personal and shared love centers on, and passes through, the child.

For the first time the First Commandment deems a Child must be loved with one's whole heart, whole soul and whole mind - with all the drive and love that God alone deserves.

20-Father to a son he adopted

The passage depicting the flight to Egypt in Matthew 2, 13-23 underlines the paternity of Joseph while at the same time discreetly and insistently pointing out that Joseph was not involved in bringing about the conception of Jesus.

The child is the focal point of these verses. Reliving the history of his people, he is being persecuted and needs to be delivered from harm. The narrative names him no less than eight times, describes his fleeing to Egypt and calls him Son and Nazarene. (Behind the title *Nazarene* can be found an allusion to David, the word *nצר* meaning *shoot* or *offspring* and hinting at the prophecy in Is 11, 1-10, “A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse,” David’s ancestor. Matthew is implying that Jesus is the son of David).

Joseph is set before us as a true father. He is the one responsible for the child and its mother, the head of the family. As such, he receives instructions from on high and carries them out. He does everything in his power to protect the child and its mother from danger, fleeing by night, setting out on the road to exile, and on the return journey making sure not to settle in Judea. The child will be safer and more secure in the town of Nazareth in Galilee. We recognize in all of this the true fatherhood of Joseph: he takes responsibility, saves the child and its mother, takes on the perils of living in exile and shares in receiving the threats being made to the child, to this family just starting out.

Joseph’s mission is to be a true father. Although Matthew constantly reminds us that Joseph is not the man who sired the child, ***he’s as precise as can be in establishing the nature of the bonds that tie Joseph to this family.*** On four occasions the Gospel writer uses the phrase, “Take the child and his mother” rather than “Take your son and your wife.” He makes clear the biological link between the youthful Mary and her child while never mentioning anything about Joseph’s tie to the boy.

The verses in Matthew 2, 13-23 echo a text in Exodus 4, 19-20. There Moses experiences circumstances similar to those of Joseph. However, while the passage in Exodus states that Moses “took ***his*** wife and ***his*** sons and started back...,” twice using the possessive adjective, Matthew’s text has the angel saying to Joseph, “Take ***the*** child and his mother,” not using “your.” In these verses, quite surprisingly, Mary isn’t even described as Joseph’s wife. Matthew strongly reinforces the notion that Joseph was not involved in the conception of this child.

Joseph had already dealt with all of this at the onset of his bewilderment (Mt 1, 18-25). He knew that he was not the father of the child that Mary was carrying in her womb. As time went by he would realize that this son wasn’t begotten by another man but emanated from the Spirit. Notwithstanding, the angel invited Joseph to become the boy’s father and welcome Mary into his home.

From his own vantage point, Luke too affirms that Joseph did not play a role in the incarnation of Jesus. He has Elizabeth recognizing Mary as mother and doesn’t mention Joseph. In taking a close look at the hymns in the first two chapters of Luke, we see that Elizabeth, the mother of John, praises the mother of the Lord, Mary the mother of Jesus gives thanks to God and Zachary, the father of the Precursor, glorifies God and extols his own son as the prophet preparing the way of the Lord. No hymn of praise is attributed to Joseph. On the contrary, the elderly Simeon is the one to proclaim the greatness of the child Jesus.

Joseph’s notable absence is intentional. It indicates that he’s not in any way involved in the incarnation of the child. Here we find another take on Mary’s affirmation: “I have no relations with a man (to enable me to conceive this child).” Indeed, salvation will come from the world of the Divine, not from earthlings; the Savior comes as a gift for humankind.

This is how to interpret Christmas icons in which Joseph always appears off to the side of the main event, contemplative, glancing elsewhere.

Invited to welcome Jesus, the child emanating from the Spirit, Joseph demonstrates that he's ready to do just that. He's willing to place his heart and mind, time and energy at the child's disposal, taking on situations laden with risk and anxiety, the road to exile and the surprises coming from this very extraordinary child. This is how he becomes the father of Jesus.

Looking into Joseph's heart and contemplating his faith, the angel in his dream said to him, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary *your* wife into your home. For it is by the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and *you are to name him Jesus...*" (Mt 1, 20-21) In using the expressions "your wife" and "you are..." the text shows that Joseph is naming the child and the child is *his*. And when it comes to Mary, the child's mother, she is said to be Joseph's wife.

The Gospels allude to the paternity of Joseph at other times: "*The child's father* and mother were amazed at what was said about him..." (Lk 2, 33), and "...his mother said to him, 'Son, *your father* and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.'" (Lk 2, 48)

Joseph is not involved in the conception of Jesus; rather he becomes Jesus's father on account of his heart's openness and generosity.

On the Feast of the Holy Family, in the Mass for the first Sunday after Christmas, the Church offers us the reading from Matthew 2, 13-23, reaffirming that Joseph is truly the father of Jesus, forming an authentic family with Jesus and Mary, the ideal and exemplar for all others.

21-Thanks, Joseph

In the mystery of the Incarnation, which especially catches our attention at Advent and Christmas, we rarely think of what we owe to Joseph.

In fact, his yes, his readiness to do what God asked him, to take in Mary and the child, smoothed the path of the Incarnation so that the mother was protected and the child had nothing to fear. On the contrary, he found the love of a family. The child was able to enjoy that balanced love provided by a father and a mother. Joseph's yes defused a dramatic situation, avoiding the mother's disgrace and possible stoning. Joseph's availability covers everything, his yes discretely cloaks the whole mystery. He guards the drama in the depths of his heart, in his integrity as a «just man» (Mt 1:19). The most extraordinary birth in history is vested in normality and Jesus has every chance of having the same life as any other child.

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We owe no small thanks to Joseph.

22-The First Christian Mission

In the Annunciation we have a glimpse of Mary as she *receives* the Good News. At the Visitation, she *bears to others* the same Good News; she shares it; she sings it. A *family* becomes Christian: “Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could into the hill country to a town in Judah. She went into Zechariah’s house and greeted Elizabeth.”

Mary’s journey is the *first* Christian mission. What Mary bears within her, what she brings to the family of Elizabeth is *Jesus*, the Messiah. Mary “went quickly,” and she went with the child in her womb. Mary went quickly and she was already intoning her Magnificat. Indeed, all the members of Elizabeth’s family will rejoice that Mary has come to them, Mary and the child in her womb. Mary sets in motion the diffusion of the Good News. Mary’s journey to her cousin may be taken as *foreshadowing* of *Paul’s* first missionary voyages, those of *Peter*, those of *all missionaries* who spread the Good News throughout the Roman Empire, of missionaries throughout history and those of the contemporary world.

Mary-like, they all bear Jesus to others; and all who receive the Good News with an upright heart overflow with joy. In Acts, we see examples of such joy: the Ethiopian who encountered Philip and was baptized by him (Acts 8); the family of Cornelius (Acts 10); and Lydia (Acts 16). Prior to all the others, however, Zachariah’s family is the first to welcome *as Lord*, the infant who resides within Mary’s womb. Elizabeth speaks truly when she calls the infant, “My Lord!” Her words constitute the first profession of Christian faith, pronounced in the midst of the first Christian family, who are experiencing, through Mary’s presence, the first Christian mission. Every true Christian addresses Jesus with the words, “You are my Lord.”

Two expressions give the key to understanding the concept of mission: (1) “set out as quickly as she could,” and (2) “upon the road.” In the first instance, the Greek word is ‘*anastása*’, meaning “set out,” cognate with “*anástasis*,” the word for “resurrection.” After the resurrection of Jesus, the nascent Church *set out* as quickly as it could upon the pathways of the world in order to announce the Good News. In the Visitation, Mary is image of the Church. The second key word is “pathway” in Greek “*hodos*.” The word is found several times in Luke’s texts, Gospel and Acts of the Apostles. Luke weights “pathway” with theological significance, because it is “along the pathway” that *evangelization* takes place.

The Evangelist’s focus *is* upon Mary, but we are also drawn to *another* consideration. We see not only *Mary’s* mission, but the mission of Luke himself, the mission of the nascent Church, and that of so many generations of disciples whose faith reaches to the shores of the contemporary world. The “water of mission” coursing through the centuries serves to irrigate *our* faith. Our faith has its origins in the first Christian mission, that of Mary.

In the footsteps of his mother, Jesus begins his journey upon the pathways of the world. He will remain faithful to the end, and will come to join us as we walk the Emmaus road. He even sends *us* on mission, with the consoling words, “I am with you always; yes, to the end of time” (Mt 28:30).

Mary’s mission met with great success. There was a springtime of joy when Elizabeth, John the Baptist, Zachariah and Mary were gathered as one in the home of Zachariah. The joy broke out in canticles praising God’s enduring love and celebrating the wondrous titles that belong to Mary’s child: Lord, Rising Sun, Salvation which frees us from our enemies. The parents of John the Baptist express their faith in the child of Mary, their young cousin. They will share their faith with their son and so enable him to be Precursor of the Messiah. The faith of Elizabeth and Zachariah is the rich soil in which the mission of the Baptist will take root.

Mary is invoked as « Queen of Apostles. » One may apply the last word to *all* who announce the Lord. Pope Paul VI gave Mary the title, “Star of Evangelization.” We too are people on the journey, and our journey intersects with the journeys of countless others. Happy shall we be if *our* greeting, like that of Mary, stirs within them the child of the Kingdom.

**23-The first song
in honour of Mary**
Lc 1, 42-45.

Usually our bibles render the song of Elizabeth in prose style. However, many exegetes have remarked that upon translating the text from Greek to Aramaic, the poetic element is discovered.

*Of all women
You are the most blessed,
And blessed is the fruit of your womb!*

*Why should I be honoured
By a visit from the Mother of my Lord?*

*For, do you see,
The moment your greeting
Reached my ears,
The child in my womb leapt for joy.*

*Yes, blessed is she
Who believed
That the promise made to her by the Lord
Would be fulfilled.*

This was the first song of praise addressed to Mary; she is declared blessed as the Lord's Mother; her greeting prompted the unborn John to leap in his mother's womb; here, unmistakably, it is Mary who is praised, Mary who is sung to. A closer look reveals the unique spiritual wealth of the song.

After the first stanza of compliments, Elizabeth honours Mary with the highest possible attribution: she calls Mary's son not only "the Lord", but "my Lord". The bond between cousins is profoundly enriched: Mary is **my Lord's Mother**.

The name given to Jesus, "the Lord", acknowledging the divinity of Jesus, expresses the faith of the Church community for whom Luke wrote his gospel around the year 80 AD. In writing as he did, Luke was inspired by 2 Sam 6:1-11 referring to the return of the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, when David uttered the prophetic words, "How could the Lord's ark come to my home?" The ark was the dwelling place of God, His Word preserved in the tablets of the Law – just as for Elizabeth, Mary had now become the dwelling place of the Lord, the very same Lord. Here in the New Testament text, four hundred years before the Council of Ephesus, Mary had been addressed by the title **Mother of God**.

The finale of the hymn is linked to the blessing at the beginning, "Happy are you who believed...", a significant recognition that Mary's faith is the basis of all her other blessings, as our faith is also. To live the beatitudes, "Happy are the poor, the merciful ..." one must have faith. The same affirmation is repeated in the last of the beatitudes to appear in the gospels, "Happy rather those who believe without having seen" (Jn 20:29). Mary was the first to live a faith exclusively centred on Jesus – she was the first one to live a Christian faith.

We observe too, that Luke uses the an irenic structure similar to the chiasm referred to earlier. Here in a circle are the characters in Elizabeth's song: Mary and the child, Mary and the Lord, Elizabeth and the child, Mary and the Lord – at the base, the Lord, the object of our faith; at the summit the Lord child, the object of our Christian faith. The characters are found in couples: Mary and Jesus, Mary and the Lord, Elizabeth and John. Symmetrically, the mothers look at each other, and the children do the same. The Lord is at the base and at the summit.

This first hymn in honour of Mary enjoys impeccable authentication: the Holy Spirit inspired it, Luke inserted it into his gospel, Luke's community welcomed it, the apostolic Church proclaimed it as an integral part of Revelation, and today all Churches read it with love and reverence.

Elizabeth's song foreshadows and inspires many other songs through which, in the Orthodox, Coptic, Armenian, Anglican and Catholic Churches, the Lord's Mother has been revered through the centuries.

*Virgin Mary, Mother of God,
you are the golden thurible
that carried the burning coal.
Blessed is he who receives him from the sanctuary
for he remits sins
and destroys our faults.
He is the Lord's Word.
who incarnated himself in you,
the one who offered himself to the right Father
as pleasant incense and sacrifice.
Rejoice Virgin Mary,
Holy Mother of God, true advocate
Of all humanity.
Pray for us in the presence of Christ
Your Son.
(From the Coptic Liturgy, Ethiopia)*

24-And she gave birth to a son, her first-born



This is an extremely discrete text, but it brings us face to face with a true childbirth. The whole human aspect is there. Mary becomes the witness par excellence of the incarnation, of the humanity of Jesus. She gives birth and is immediately occupied: Jesus is a human baby, in need of being wrapped up and placed in a cradle. Mary's humanity and the humanity of Jesus go perfectly together.

And Mary's gestures, wrapping the child up and laying him down, show that he is welcomed in love.

Jesus' first experience of human life will be one of being loved. Mary and Joseph are the ones who assure that, and it is magnificent that the first thing our humanity offered God was love. « In our time, the organisation of instruction means that parents are no longer the only ones to look after the whole education of their children: the complexity of our culture forbids this. But, in the world where Mary and Joseph lived, the parents were the ones to provide all or almost all. There was certainly religious instruction in the synagogue, but the essentials one learned in the house of one's father and mother. Mary and Joseph were those with the mission of 'forming' Jesus. » 201. They had to introduce him to the demanding challenge of becoming a man.

Towards the end of Jesus' childhood, when it is said "he went down with them to Nazareth and lived under their authority!" (Lk 2: 52), Richard Rohr comments: "Jesus must have found an extraordinary love in them. We can affirm that about Mary and Joseph with regard to Jesus. A person as integrated and free as Jesus would have had to have extraordinary parents. They must have loved him without manipulation, without those primitive schemes which inculcate shame and fear and are so common. (And for Joseph he adds) I believe that Joseph must have been an extraordinary man and father, otherwise Jesus would not have been able to call God 'Abba' so spontaneously. He would not have been able to believe so totally in his heavenly Father, and accept the masculine word for God, if he had not had a human father who had been for him very, very good." 202 Bernard Martelet, quoting Father Fabre, writes: "At the beginning, God created the human being in his own image and likeness", thus expressing God's extraordinary love for us. Now a woman communicates her likeness to God. This also expresses the extraordinary love between a mother and her child; this child who is God." 203

And when we think of 'mission', there is none more appropriate for a Christian than to give Jesus to the world. Here we touch the high point of Mary's mission. Not only has she given the world the child of promise, but she has loved, educated, guided him, together with Joseph, and what they have offered us is an adult man, of a unique psychological equilibrium, a man fitted to be the Messiah, Saviour, Son of God, as Elisabeth and the whole early Church recognised.

With regard to Mary's action of wrapping Jesus in swaddling clothes, Aristide Serra makes this observation: "While Marie wraps her child in swaddling clothes, the glory of God is covering the shepherds with its light."

Two similar actions which describe what salvation is about : on one hand, a young mother totally occupied in wrapping up her baby, the sign of her love, and her acceptance, and on the other, a God occupied in enveloping humanity in his light. We are at the conjunction of two extraordinary loves.

Verse 7: “And she gave birth to a son, her first-born”, requires an explanation. The Bible of Jerusalem has a very clear note: “In Biblical Greek, the term “first-born” does not necessarily imply younger brothers, but emphasizes the child’s dignity and rights.”

It is above all a juridical term in Jewish society linked to the promises made by God, and it is also a term embodying a religious value, since the first-born belonged to God.

The first-born was, as it were, especially consecrated. We discover this aspect with Esau and Jacob, Manasseh and Ephraim. Recalling the case of Esau, the Letter to the Hebrews, 12 : 16-17, says: «Be careful that there is no immorality, or that any of you does not degrade religion like Esau, who sold his birthright for one single meal. As you know, when he wanted to obtain the blessing afterwards, he was rejected and, though he pleaded for it with tears, he was unable to elicit a change of heart. » Ruben was the first-born of Jacob, but he lost his dignity because he had sexual relations with one of his father’s concubines (Gn 35: 21-22...). The death of the «first-born » of Egypt was significant because the nation was struck in its most representative part. « In a patriarchal family, the eldest son has a privileged position: he succeeds his father as head of the family and receives a double portion of the inheritance (with a special blessing that recognizes the right of age). » Israel, who was « the eldest son of God », (Ex 4: 22) also had a privileged role in the history of salvation, and Egypt paid dearly for not giving the « eldest son » his freedom.

The « eldest son » is especially characterised by his special belonging to God: « Consecrate all the first-born to me, the first issue of every womb among the sons of Israel. Whether man or beast, this is mine » (Ex. 13, 2). This will subsequently be extended even to the produce of the soil (Lev. 22).

For certain Protestant groups, however, the expression « first-born » suggests subsequent births and so Jesus is not the only child of Mary and Joseph. Not all Protestant theologians think this way. François Bovon of Geneva asks: “Why does Luke employ this expression « first-born »? By itself this adjective “first-born” does not offer any decisive proof for the existence of brothers of Jesus according to the flesh. Does this adjective not send us back to the first will of the Creator God to whom Jesus belongs? Or, is it not a Christological title to designate the Lord in his incarnation and resurrection as the first-born of a new humanity? This qualifying adjective is very rare in the bible. The word recalls the birth of the fathers or even the existence of Israel, the first-born of God. In any case, Luke places Jesus in his unique relation with the Father, and not in his relation with brothers or sisters.” Luke picks up this title again in the account of the Presentation, with the precise clarification that “the first-born male belongs to God”.

For Luke the meaning of the title is ‘this child belongs to God in a quite special way, he is his First-born.’ I think, in fact, that the term ‘first-born’ forms part of the titles given to Jesus in the birth pericope. These titles offer us the following picture: in the city of David, and Jesus will be called son of David, Mary gives birth to a ‘first-born’ son, who is Saviour, Christ, Lord. Luke is preoccupied with the identity of Jesus. For the Lutheran Frederick W. Denker, the title ‘first-born’ emphasizes that this child has a right to inherit the throne of David (Cf 2 Chron 21: 3).

THE FIRST-BORN

In the Bible, the term “first-born” has a sociological and theological value.

The term refers to the dignity and rights, to the role of the first-born in society at that time and, in general, to all traditional societies based on agriculture or farming. The first-born is the one who normally becomes head of the family or clan. When problems arise, in the absence of the parents, the first-born is the one who calls the family together, guides the discussions and sanctions the decisions. He creates and assures the unity of the family. His social importance is such that he is always called “first-born” even if he is the only child. The writing on a tomb stone found in Jerusalem bears witness to this: a mother died giving birth to her “first-born” son.

But the term also assumes a further theological value. Then it stands in relation to other passages of Scripture which throw light on Jesus:

1-“Every first-born boy will be consecrated to the Lord” (Ex 13:2; Lk 2:2).

2-“(Jesus is) the first-born of all creation” (Col 1:15).

3-“he was the first to be born from the dead that he should be first in every way” (Col 1: 18, and Apoc. 1: 5).

4-«Christ has been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of all who have fallen asleep!» (1Cor 15 : 20).

5-“so that his Son might be the eldest of many brothers” (Rom 8: 30).

6-« And he the eldest will not be ashamed to call us “brothers” (cf Hb 2: 17).

7- Those saved by the Son form the Church « in which everyone is a ‘first-born son’ and a citizen of heaven” (Hb 12: 23).

8-The prophet Zechariah describes the lamentation for the just one as that made for a first-born: « They will look on the one whom they have pierced; they will mourn for him as for an only son » (Zc 12: 10).

Luke situates himself on the theological level, as does John in his Prologue where the Word is presented as the only Son, full of grace and truth. Biblical thought embraces all the dignities of this first-born son.

25-The mother's face

Benedict XVI, in his homily of 1st January 2010, said: « (Mary) was the first to see the face of God made man in the fruit of her womb. The mother has a special rapport, unique and in some way exclusive, with the new born child. The first face the child sees is its mother's, and this look is decisive for its rapport with life, with itself, with others and with God. This look is decisive for it to also become « a child of peace » (Lk 10: 6).

The first face the child sees is its mother's. In fact, the child has started discovering its mother already: it knows her voice, the caresses she has given it while still in the womb, the beating of her heart. It hears the often repeated name which it ends up understanding as its own in the society of men. The child discovers its mother's eyes, smile, different tones of voice, the warmth of her body when she holds it against herself, and feeds it. The mother sets the child on the road towards full human maturity.

But his mother's face is also the last thing that Jesus sees: « Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother... Seeing his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother: « Woman, this is your son! ». Then to the disciple he said, « This is your mother! » (Jn 19 : 25-27). In these three verses, Mary is the first named and the last, and the word "mother" is repeated five times. The text says explicitly that Jesus looked at her. In the midst of his agony, Jesus has his eyes full of his mother's face. Then the disciple takes the mother into his house, he fills his house with the mother's presence, he acts like a new Jesus.

On Calvary, Jesus bestows on Mary a new motherhood, she becomes mother of the beloved disciple, symbol of all disciples. But Jesus also engenders the Church, mother of all disciples. Mary and the beloved disciple form the first cell of the Church: living under the same roof, they form the same community.

At Christmas, it is Mary who engenders the child; he depends in everything on her. For us, in our history as disciples, it is the Church which bears us, calls us by name, nourishes us and sets us out on the paths of love and apostolic work; she has made sons of us. Mother Church never abandons her children.

But on Calvary, it is Jesus who engenders the mothers: Mary, to whose care he confides us, and the Church who gives birth to us in baptism and then educates us in the faith, until we become ourselves fathers, mothers, pastors, of so many disciples still in process of growth and in need of affection. On Calvary, it is Jesus who gives us mothers, and by the resurrection he makes us sons. On Calvary, the new humanity is born.

At the two moments of Christmas and Calvary, the mother's face is important. God is telling us that the adventure of salvation is first of all an adventure of love, a family adventure.

26-The mother and child

In mother and child beat the heart of life. A pregnant mother carries within herself a new person, a unique human universe. The seed of mystery sprouts in her, takes root in her body, her heart, her intelligence: genesis of a new eternity.

The mother loves, nourishes, soothes, protects, educates and also takes on the share of sorrow inherent in all motherhood. She welcomes into herself another person, assists the emergence of another person into the light in the best climate of love possible. With her love, intelligence, sense of responsibility, the mother lays the foundation of the child's psychology.

Between Mary and the child Jesus there is a unique density of humanity. Mary constructs and penetrates the whole of the substance of Jesus' humanity. Take away from a person what the mother has contributed, and the person's personality collapses. The child is nothing without the mother. But the mother, too, is totally changed by the child she bears. There exists a deep communion-osmosis between these two persons, and, in our case between Mary and Jesus, a communion which is physical, affective, psychological, spiritual. In his admirable Letter to Women of 25 June 1995, John Paul II wrote: « Thank you to you, woman-mother, who welcomes the human being, in the joy and pain of a unique experience; you become the smile of God for the child who is born, you guide its first steps, sustain its growth... » Benedict XVI picks up this thought: « She (Mary) was the first to see the face of God made man in the fruit of her womb. The mother has a special rapport, unique and in some way exclusive, with the new born child. The first face the child sees is its mother's, and this look is decisive for its rapport with life, with itself, with others and with God. This look is decisive for it becoming also « a child of peace: » (homily of 1st January 2010).

Christa Meves, mother, scholar, psychotherapist, with ten years of experience of dealing with children carrying inner traumas, says: « When the child is born, it knows the heartbeat of its mother, her voice and even the taste of her milk, so similar to the taste of the amniotic liquid... Instinctively, mothers turn to crying children on their left side so that they may rediscover the beating of the heart, the rhythm they have known since the mother's womb. » (In *Journée de prière en l'honneur de Marie, Mère de tous les peuples* – Pentecost, 31 May 2009, LanXess-Kolnarena – Cologne – Germany.)

“Each one of us has been given his own share of grace... (for) building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4: 7, 12). But Mary was given the grace of accepting into her womb and giving flesh to the body of Jesus Christ himself.

These are the bonds God weaves between mother and child, between him and us. Our humanity is penetrated with divinity, while God takes our flesh. The humanity is illuminated by it, while the divinity is eclipsed by our opaque flesh.

27-From mother to child

Some time ago, I was travelling by bus within Nairobi when a young man boarded and took a seat. He then decided to recite his little parody to convert the travellers to the “true faith”. He stood in front of us, called for attention while he got out an envelope. Opening it, he picked up the letter and threw away the envelope. He asked, “Do you understand this gesture? This is what we must do in our faith.

Mary is the envelope,
 Jesus the message.
 Let us keep the message
 and throw away the envelope!”

I thought, “That harebrained fellow insults his mother! Does he consider his own mother like a simple envelope?” In fact all mothers are insulted by this reflection. Was my mother an envelope or a heart that wanted me, loved, fed, rocked, protected and educated me? Besides, she assumed all the sufferings that maternity entails. The mother is, first of all, a person who welcomes another life, who desires another person, who favours the emergence of a new person into the most loving climate possible. By her love and intelligence, the mother weaves the basic fibre of her child’s psychology. In truth, the child realises this since he does not let go of his mother, takes refuge in her arms, looking for this human warmth that will be the best perfume in his whole life.

Between Mary and her child Jesus, there is this deep bond of humanity from the mother to the child, from the child to the mother. Now, if we remove from a person what the mother deposited there, we deprive the person of his full personality. France Quéré, a respected Protestant theologian said, “A mother is not a matrix, but intelligence, a heart and a lot of daring!” Let us note that the mother in turn is all changed by the child she carries. There exists a profound communion, a mutual osmosis between two persons. And this was indeed the case also for Jesus and Mary. Jesus can say to his mother: « I am bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh », and the mother can reply to the child: «But you are the one who has made me in your image and likeness. »

Between a girl and a young woman who is expecting a child there is the difference between *I* and *we*. An expectant mother thinks in the plural, lives in the plural, is completely transformed by the child which arouses so many words of love in her. But to think in the plural is to become responsible: the mother knows she is responsible for her child. This responsibility means love, time, intelligence to educate, patience for the child growing up, capacity for suffering, communion in joy and tears, fidelity. The mother knows she is responsible not only for the child but for the grown up son. For Mary, that means the joys of Nativity and the sorrows of the new motherhood on Calvary. When Jesus is born in Bethlehem, Mary wraps him swaddling clothes and love, while God envelops the shepherds with light and tidings of great joy for all. When Jesus is brought down from the cross, he is wrapped in a winding sheet before his mother’s eyes, in expectation of the light and joy of the resurrection.

Mary loved Jesus,
 who is the perfect Love.
 Mary said “yes” to Jesus
 who is the perfect “YES”.
 Mary has given birth to Jesus
 who is our full Life.
 Mary, with motherly words, has cradled Jesus:
 who is the Word since the beginning.
 Mary has fed Jesus
 who is our Bread of life.
 Mary helped the first steps of Jesus,
 Who is our unique Way.
 Mary taught Jesus the meaning of things;
 Jesus, who is the Wisdom from above.
 Mary showed Jesus how to pray;
 Jesus, our only Prayer.

True human love comes to dwell
in the heart of God.
our time, into Eternity, our life, in Life!
Always passing through our human flesh.

28-The disciple took her into his home

John 19:27

From that hour... It is the hour of Jesus, an hour without end. It still goes on today when disciples of our time must take the mother into their homes.

The verb “to take” (*lambano*”, in Greek) expresses a very particular nuance in John’s gospel. The evangelist reserved that term for Jesus, in the sense of welcoming to him or not. Used here for the mother, the author of the gospel wants us to understand how much the mother is a part of the Son. Indeed, Jesus gives what belongs intimately to Him and is very dear to his heart.

The disciple took her into his home. The home in Greek “*eis ta idia*”, allows for many translations: in the house, in the family, in his property, among his treasures. Thus, the mother who was treasured by the Son, became one of the disciple’s treasures. It is appropriate since the beloved disciple had been named a “son”. But, the home of the disciple was also the community around him, his Church. Mary was welcomed into the Church: within the new people of God she found her final place. This is the last picture we have of Mary: the mother among the disciples, exactly as indicated in Luke’s Gospel.

It was for this reason that the second Vatican Council (1962-1965) decided not to create a separate document on Mary, but rather to include her in the document on the Church. The Council did not wish to place Mary above God’s people but in the midst of the Church albeit as its pre-eminent member.

By his words, Jesus created new relationships of responsibility: of the mother to the son, of the son towards the mother. It is sometimes asked, “But how can one be responsible for Mary?” Simply by imitating John: he took the mother into his home, into his heart, into his life, into his community. Let us recall that the author of the fourth gospel reserved two choice places for her in the text: at Cana, the feast of love, and at the Cross where the deeper meanings are revealed. Why does John always call Mary, **Jesus’ mother?** As a sign of respect. It was his way to convey the uniqueness of the woman. All her glory comes from Jesus. The love of the Master lights up the mother’s countenance.

Origen comments: “In the Scripture, surely the Gospels hold the premier position, and among the Gospels the first place goes to John. However, one cannot grasp the *meaning* of John’s Gospel without resting one’s head upon the heart of Jesus, or without receiving Mary from Jesus as one’s own mother.” What Origen says of John’s Gospel, every Christian who has some familiarity with Scripture, finds really true. John’s Gospel is deep, mystical. John presents Jesus in a rather daring way which opens up a wealth of meaning. Each chapter brings with it a harvest of Messianic titles applied to Jesus.

For what reason does Mary appear in John? Answering the question has produced a great amount of theological research. The saints, for their part, know that “taking Mary into their home” helps to center one’s life upon her Son with particular efficacy, while imparting to life an apostolic dimension that is both creative and daring.

29-Faith at the Hour of the Cross

This scene in John's Gospel which shows Mary at the foot of the cross is very well known:

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home. (John 19, 25-27)

How can a mother find herself there, in this dreadful place where her only son is suffering and dying, the one that she loves and who is the whole meaning of her life? Maternal instinct, maternal fidelity, undoubtedly, even if she can do nothing to help her son; she is helpless as is he; she is also engulfed in death.

What faith could have sustained Mary at that moment of the agony and death of her son? That is a faith called love, fidelity, intimate knowledge of the Son, faith which precedes seeing and which nonetheless has also already seen, faith which allows everything that concerns the Son to ripen in her heart. Better than Paul she can say: *"yet I love, no longer I, but Christ lives in me."* (Gal. 2, 20) From the beginning she had allowed herself to be invaded by the Son, her life had become the space of the Christ.

Works of art which represent Mary with her dead son in her arms are familiar to us. We call them *pietas*, the best known is Michelangelo's, on the right at the entrance of St. Peter's Basilica. The first meaning of the Latin word *pieta* related to the fidelity of soldiers right up to the point of death. Thus the first meaning of Mary having the dead Jesus in her arms is the fidelity of the mother right up to the point of death. Mary has been faithful to the end.

Mary's faith, at the hour of the Son's death, expresses itself in a hostile context: injustice, hatred, contempt, mockery, the indifference of many, the exposed nude body of the Son, the deep solitude of Jesus and his mother. Who understood this sacrifice? The closest disciples saved themselves, hidden, isolated. Now that Jesus has his hands nailed, the leaders of the people remind him of his miracles and cry to him to come down from the cross. That's the condition they set for believing: *"Come down from the cross that we may see and believe."* (Mark 15,32) *"And the rulers, meanwhile, sneered at him."* (Luke 23,35)

Mary doesn't ask for any sign, she is presence, fidelity and silence. She looks at her Son and Isaiah's description of the Suffering Servant comes to her mind: *"There was in him no stately bearing to make us look at him, nor appearance that would attract us to him. He was spurned and avoided by men; a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity, one of those from whom men hid their faces."* (Isaiah 53, 2-3) How long had Mary compared this portrait of the Messiah to the announcements of the passion that her Son had endured? What was in the great sanctuary of the mother's heart that kept faith's flame alive? The veiled announcements of the resurrection? *"The Son of Man is to be handed over to men, and they will kill him and he will be raised on the third day."* (Matthew 17, 22-23) Had she learned what Jesus said to Martha a few moments before the resurrection of Lazarus: *"I am the resurrection and the life"*? It is certain the Mary didn't understand everything, but she had the ability to allow her Son's words that she didn't understand settle in her heart and in her prayer.

And then there was the silence of heaven, the silence of the Father. Mary's faith had to make that silence welcome. God had taken the road of silence and powerlessness; the Father and the Spirit put their steps in the steps of the Son. Jesus said: *"The Father and I are one."* (John 10,30) At Calvary the Father could also say: *"The Son and I are one."* The Son wishes himself powerless from human power; the Father and the Spirit wish the same which is amazing. God had taken the path of absolute love, he was going to reveal his absolute love, and the cross is the summit of absolute love. Mary is also silence, powerlessness, but in communion with the absolute love of her Son. She is there, she is present and the Son can say to her: *"Woman, here is your son!"*, announcement of a grand spring, hidden sign of the resurrection.

Considering the gift of the beloved disciple, St. Bernard makes this surprising reflection: *"What a terrible exchange. Mother, John is given to you in the place of Jesus, the servant in the place of the Lord, the disciple in the place of the Master, the son of Zebedee in the place of the Son of God, a simple man in the place of the true God..."* (Office of Readings for September 15) And so it is! We are all the beloved disciples invaded by the presence of the Son, by the sanctity of the Son, by his Spirit. Mary has only one Son, Jesus, all the others are sons within the Son. We are not seeing a decline of the motherhood of Mary but rather amplification without limits.

Here Mary revives the faith of the Annunciation; once again a mysterious maternity opens within her. Mary sees that her heart gives birth again when Jesus says to her: *“Woman, here is your son!”* The maternity of the Annunciation knows a new spring. Mary’s answer to the Angel Gabriel remains true forever: *“I am the servant of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”* (Luke 1, 38) But now it is no longer Gabriel who speaks, it is her Son, he speaks his will.

30-To walk with the unexpected things of God

Mary experienced in her life a succession of unexpected events which confronted her in God's plan of the salvation, a plan hidden for ever. Each of these unexpected events placed her in a painful life situation. In the unexpected, there is always a call towards greater life. She knew she was loved by God and called to place her trust in Him. But we also see Mary summon up her human and spiritual qualities to respond to God's surprises. In this, she is close to us; our life also is full of the unknown and surprises in the world of work, health, family relations; they can become paths to resurrection.

All the unexpected events in the life of the Virgin Mary came from Jesus. She had undertaken a project of ordinary life, that of her human love with the young Joseph. She was already his wife when she received Gabriel's visit. She was far from expecting the message which came to her from Heaven and guessing what a unique child was being proposed for her. The first words of Gabriel : "Rejoice full of grace, the Lord is with thee", shook the young Mary. She guessed that the greeting was full of the unknown and was asking her to redirect her life towards a future shrouded in mystery. Even after she had said : "Behold the handmaid of the Lord" she was heading towards uncertain situations : "how will Joseph react? What welcome will his family give it? What opinion will the men of Israel have of her?"

Thus she was far from realising that she would have to set out immediately for Bethlehem : as the Emperor Augustus wanted, but also Joseph and especially God. It is certain that Mary, a young mother, dreamed of a beautiful birth for her child, but he would be born in a manger, he would be visited by poor shepherds and by Magi coming from afar and bringing to their journey's end the perfume of the Orient. If in Jerusalem, Herod was upset, at Bethlehem the young Mary must have been completely surprised.

There followed the going up to the Temple to present her "first-born" Son. All began very well. The elderly Simeon adorns the child with prestigious titles : Messiah, salvation prepared before the nations, light of the people, and glory of Israel. Mary's eyes are focussed on this old prophet so full of the Spirit. Suddenly everything darkens: the child will be a sign of contradiction, many will be tested by his name, and a sword is foretold for the mother, a sword which will pierce her heart.

The presentation of the child having been achieved, the young peasant from Nazareth hears Joseph tell her : "Herod wishes to kill the child. We must flee, take the road to Egypt." It is terribly unexpected for the whole of this little family: to hasten down the path of exile with all that haste, anguish and difficulty of life suppose. It is good that the child is at the centre of all this, it is for him that they live; since the day of the Annunciation he has captured their entire hearts: he has become the treasure of their lives. But since that day, she has learnt that God is unforeseeable; there has been surprise after surprise, but she is sure that God loves her.

After the return from Egypt, there follow days of peace; the child grows healthy and robust. When he is twelve, the time has come for his first pilgrimage to Jerusalem on the occasion of the Pasch. The holy family spends a joyous week in the holy city, singing in the Temple the psalms and praises of their ancestors amidst clouds of incense. Comes the time to return, Jesus is not with them, nor is he among his relatives. The soul is struck with anguish, the search commences. How could Mary have been able to guess that? She could feel the sword pierce, implacable; she holds herself responsible, she is the mother who has lost her son, and what a Son! Mary and Joseph live the Passion before all others: three days without their Lord, three days without their Son, and three days in Jerusalem right at the time of Passover. And when they do find him it is no longer their son but the Son of the Father: "Do you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" The adolescent Jesus begins to detach himself from his earthly family. It is a real revolution in the heart of the mother, she guesses that he will

separate himself one day to be the prophet, the brother of all, in a universal family. And yet the young adolescent comes down with them to Nazareth. There follow long, peaceable years. Mary sees the prophet grow : he speaks unique, shining words, he reveals to his mother deeply human feelings. She guesses that he will sway the crowds, that many will acclaim him, and many will come to him with their wounds, he will allow them to touch the fringe of his garment to be cured in their body and to have a soul that chants the Magnificat.

It is good what occurred and yet all will finish on Calvary: he on the Cross, naked, nailed, mocked, in agony, with that mysterious cry : “My God, my God why hast thou abandoned me?” And he dies as she continues the barely begun psalm. And then just before, he poured out from the heart a limitless maternity on all his disciples, a maternity suitable for the unexpected things of God: “Woman, behold thy son!” Who would have been able to say on the shining day of the Annunciation that the light of the world would extend itself over Calvary and that the maternity of Mary would pass from the Son to the sons?

It is not easy to walk with this unforeseeable God. It is required to have a heart so stripped, so confident in the will of the Father. He is not a distant God; he makes choices so contrary to our nature: he also is in his Son, nailed, defenceless, he also chose to leave himself submerged by the wickedness of men in order to envelope all in the pardon of his mercy. It has been truly said that we reach him by narrow paths.

Mary has made her path through all these unexpected happenings. Doubtless, she heard Gabriel say to her twice: “The Lord is with thee. Fear not Mary.” She has well understood that the salutation of the angel was above all love, then strength and then fidelity: God was with her, on her, in her. She had given a response of love to the love of God: “I am the servant of the Lord”. But in her reply, which lasted a lifetime, we also find typically human qualities. The first is within her the need to understand, an effort of intelligence to see clearly: to understand the greeting of Gabriel, then all that was said of the child, then to preserve in the heart all that could not be immediately understood. Mary is an intelligent woman. At the same time she is a woman of interiority, of reflection, of maturity, she sees much in the sanctuary of the heart, where is born the light, or fidelity becomes a habit. Mary is also a woman who can adapt herself to the vibrations of God. The Magnificat reveals a woman who has already made the choice of the Son: the humble, the deprived. She is also on the same wave length of our human needs ; she alerts the Son when the wine begins to fail in the festival of love.

We ourselves also respond to the unexpected with all that we are, with the qualities that are in us, with the solidness that is within. Mary has not avoided the unexpected, she has faced up to it, first of all because her heart is so full of the Son; it is love which causes one to walk difficult paths. We also face the hurdles of life following the heart which beats in our breasts. The choice of Mary has often opened the route to the Son. With him she has walked with the various unexpected things to the day of resurrection, the day unforeseeable and yet announced.

31-Mary's faith

In the joy of the Visitation, Elisabeth terminates her song to the Mother of the Lord with this beatitude: « Blessed are you who have believed... »

This is the first of all the beatitudes in the New Testament, and it is for the young Mary. It will also be the last of the beatitudes in the gospels: « Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed » (Jn. 20: 28). One may be surprised by the way the faith beatitude is formulated here, because we have a tendency to apply what is said to our faith. We are today the ones who believe without having seen. But the text expresses a past : « Blessed are those who have not seen and yet *have believed* ». Who can these people be who have believed without having seen? Certainly Mary, for at the Annunciation she lends her faith to all that concerns her Son's future. She believes in things to come. But there are also the persons standing at the foot of the cross and whose faith is fidelity, love, presence, attachment to this Son engulfed in death. Among them, two persons are highlighted : the mother and the beloved disciple. In the darkness spreading over Calvary, their faith is tending towards the light of Easter.

This beatitude is also the basic beatitude on which all the others depend: « Blessed the poor, blessed the meek... ». The beatitude of faith accepts Christ, accepts the one who is poor, meek, a peace-maker, persecuted..., accepts the one who is the model and aim of every disciple.

If Elisabeth terminated her praises of Mary with his beatitude, it was also to underline that it was not an easy faith. Mary is living something unheard of: in her womb a child is forming who is the Holy One, the Son of God. She has no previous example to fall back on. She would even have against her faith the traditional faith of her people: the one God, not yet manifest as Trinity. Mary abandons herself to the angel's word: « Nothing is impossible to God... ».

John's gospel gives Mary's faith an even more luminous image. In the first sign at Cana, John places Mary as the model of the woman who believes. When Jesus says to her: « Woman, how does that concern you or me? », he calls forth the faith of his mother which springs forth completely when Mary tells the servants: « Do whatever he tells you ! » And the mother's faith passes to the disciples: « They saw his glory and believed in him. » And ever since, that faith travels from disciple to disciple and has come to enlighten our own faith. In our faith shines the Mother's.

All the signs in John require faith. But they form a sort of **V** where, in the first part of the letter, faith, starting from the mother, diminishes from sign to sign. The paralysed man of chapter five has no faith in Jesus; many of the disciples in chapter six abandon Jesus. Here faith becomes negative. As we see in Chapter 6, the greater number of Jesus' disciples demonstrate a "negative faith;" they depart from the Messiah. For them, Jesus is an occasion of scandal; his words are hard to endure. It is at this point that the Evangelist first mentions Judas, the one who betrayed Jesus. Judas serves to illustrate the ultimate stance to which a negative faith descends.

In the second part of the letter **V** faith becomes stronger and stronger: with Peter in chapter six, then the man born blind in chapter nine, with the cry of Martha and Mary at the resurrection of Lazarus, but absolute purity is attained at the Cross by the beloved disciple and by the mother: it is a faith fidelity, whatever happens, nourished without a doubt by the love of the one who loved right up to the end. Thus Mary's faith and her maternal presence form an inclusive framework to John's gospel. Mary is the mother of Jesus, but for us she is the great model of faith.

32-The Marian Face of the Church among us

An image of the Virgin Mary became of capital importance during the last General Chapter: it was the Virgin of the Visitation: *a mother, a woman, a lay woman on mission*. The Chapter document is punctuated with this image and the slogan: « With Mary, go in haste to a new land! »

Retreats in the Provinces have felt the need to give flesh to this prophetic call. A theme for reflection has emerged, that of the « *Marial face of the Church* »: Mary, *mother, woman, lay woman* lending her face to the Church, revealing to the Church an important aspect of her nature.

At l'Hermitage, two images of Mary attract attention. In the fresco room, the first on entering represents Mary with the child. The child is on the level of the *heart*, *heart* of the fresco and *heart* of the mother, as if the whole adventure of salvation is explained by the *heart*: crossroad of love and faith. The second is the gilded statue of the Virgin in the chapel, on whose breast hangs a *heart*. In this heart, Marcellin placed the names of the Brothers leaving « in haste for a new land! ». As if the mission had no meaning or urgency unless it had matured in the *heart* of the Mother.

For us Marists, it is something great to have as task to make concrete this « *Marial face of the Church* »: to act so that our words, relationships, friendships, work are all filtered through the *heart*. The first requirement of a Marist: « To educate well, it is first necessary to love! » Each Brother, living Marcellin's charism, becomes the source of countless initiatives in favour of youth and the poor. Under his loving care, the youth matures into « the upright citizen and the good Christian ».

The Marial face of the Church is a *heart* and a *presence* of *mother, woman, lay person*, a presence which sets the Church out on the route of the poor. Mary leads to Christ, but she also always leads to man. To live with Mary is to give oneself an increase of humanity. There we discover a new aspect of the saints and of Mary: they are the champions of humanity.

As mother, Mary presents another dimension, that of the *sense of responsibility*. Love is always tempered by the sense of responsibility, which opens to the child the routes of freedom. Between mother and child there is a *union* made up of a thousand things, and at the same time a *distance*, so that the child is not simply a copy but grows into its own personality. The Church too has to remain sensible to its responsibility to lead the faithful to freedom, to a true personal growth in Christ.

Mary is the mirror in which the Church looks to discover her nature. Mary is Church and type of the Church. In her the Church discovers not one aspect of herself but a way of being in her totality, with a democratic face which allows all disciples to rejoice in the same dignity: « There is one Body and one Spirit, such that your vocation calls you to a single hope: one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who reigns over all, acts through all, and dwells in all » (Eph 4:4-6).

Mary is a perfect image of the Church and of the Marist. During tireless days, we weave an infinity of bonds which allow others: brothers, friends, youth, children, parents, to become the unique persons they are. Church and educator, like Mary, must first of all be *love*, and allow their *maternal* reality to excel, tempered by the sense of *responsibility*. When the Church looks at Mary, she discovers that she is first of all mother. First of all there was mother and child, then the prophet and the apostles.

This Marial face is also evident in the gestures women make in the Gospels and in the Church: Martha invites Jesus into her home, a space of peace and friendship. Mary pours a pure perfume of *nard* over the feet of Jesus and the whole house is filled with it; the sinful woman covers the Lord's feet with kisses, bathes them with her tears and wipes them with her hair. The Samaritan woman becomes before Jesus a woman disarmed, humble, a woman thirsting in her maturity, to whom is revealed « the water that springs to eternal life ». Women see Jesus die and are the first messengers of the resurrection. They bring the good news to Peter and the apostles. Like Mary, they are all laity. Today they still form the solid base of the Church.

Article 25 of *Around the same table* says: « Living the Marist charism from the perspective of women invites us all to adopt in our lives the Marian elements such as tenacity, stamina, maternal affection, tenderness, attention to detail and intuition in our daily experience. »

The Marial face of the Church, *face of mother, woman, lay person*, is born in the *heart, a heart* which every Marist must cultivate. Marcellin's *heart* was at the origins of the first missionaries to Oceania, the missionary explosion of 1903, Henri Vergès in Algeria, Servando and his companions in the Congo, and the Brothers setting out today for *mission ad gentes* to help people read the *Heart* of God.

Mission, however, is not measured in kilometres, but is entirely in the *treasure* in which the heart is rich: *Jesus, the Lord*. No missionary can warm, enlighten, bring joy if he does not burn himself. *Mission is passion* which becomes « the haste of Mary to a new land. »

Some young Poles were surprised by the absence of priests among us. I told them: « Yes, we cultivate *fraternity!* » A new light shone in their eyes. *Fraternity* is Mary's gift to us. *Fraternity* has no place for domination, but acceptance, respect, promotion of the other. It is typically Marial.

Mary offers the Church *the face of a mother, woman, lay person, who has no other claim to power than unarmed love, free gratuitous and responsible*. This face comes before dogmas, rites, homelies, authority; it humanises them and makes them attractive. It is not at all opposed to *authority*, on the contrary, it reanimates it and then Peter can say: « *Lord, ... you know that I love you* » (Jn 21:17).

33-Mary, unique presence in the Church

Jesus is the central sun of our faith, the unique Saviour, the unique Mediator, the only name in which we find salvation.

But when we come to redeemed humanity, it is Mary who occupies a unique place, extraordinarily great.

In July 2009, I had the chance to visit the Orthodox monasteries of Meteora, in Greece. The icons of the Aghios Stephanos monastery have just been restored to their splendour, the gold adding its sumptuous glow. In the monastery church, icons of Mary were everywhere, representing the Marial cycle in the Scriptures: Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, the Presentation in the Temple, Cana, Calvary, and, in the iconostasis as the Theotokos, and again in the apse: the solemn mother holding the Son on her knees. All Orthodox churches are full of Marial presence and devotion. No other saint enjoys such a representation.

The Catholic Church also accords a unique place to the Mother of Jesus. Sanctuaries dedicated to her are everywhere in the Catholic world: Lourdes, Fatima, Loreto, Czestochowa, Guadalupe in Mexico, l'Aparecida in Brasil, Vailankanni in India... These sanctuaries draw hundreds of millions of faithful who rediscover or reaffirm their faith in the Lord Jesus.

There are also a thousand forms of expressing love for Mary in the Church: the rosary, litanies, medals, scapulars, holy pictures with particular prayers such as the Memorare or formulas of consecration to the Mother of God. Songs hymn the praises of Mary in the most varied ways. In many homes, an image of Mary is present in the main room or in the bedroom. The every year there appear books, booklets, articles, pastoral or deeply exegetic reflections. And Mary is also present in the arts: music, painting, sculpture, architecture...

Another very strong presence of Mary are the numerous religious families bearing her name, like the Marist Brothers, the Marianists, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, and even more feminine congregations. These Families multiply Mary's presence in their establishments: schools, colleges, universities, youth centres, dispensaries, hospitals, houses of prayer, transmitting their particular Marial style.

Stronger still are the official feasts the Church has instituted to celebrate the Mother of the Lord: Mary Immaculate, Mary Mother of God, the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, the memorials. Then four dogmas directly concern Mary: her divine motherhood, her perpetual virginity, her immaculate conception and her assumption into heaven. Here the Church is involved as guarantor and teacher of the faith.

Is it too much? Certain Protestants see in it a sort of spiritual cancer; but among them are also those who say: the case of Mary in her relationship to her Son is unique. Luther did not hesitate to affirm that Mary is the Mother of all the disciples of the Son and the Mother of all the Church, and all his life he invoked her under the title of « sweet Mother of God! ».

For us, they are so many avenues, roads, paths which lead to the Son, the unique sun of our faith, loved by a heart which has let itself be taught by the Mother.

34-Mary in the Document of the XXI General Chapter

The Document of the XXI General Chapter is a text that is short but dense: about 50 pamphlet pages with an abundance of photos. Of these pages, 30 are reserved for a spiritual reflection and 25 for more practical matters.

In this rather brief document, what is surprising is the great number of times the name, the life, the example of the Virgin Mary are recalled. Her name appears 26 times, almost on every page of the spiritual part. What is even more surprising is that appears in the slogan offered as model: « *With Mary, go in haste to a new land!* » This slogan is repeated 7 times as a reflection title. Thrice it is found in strategic places: the Document's title, the title of the Fundamental Call, the title of the prayer. So Mary occupies a very important place. She is the one we are called to look at and imitate.

The mother we are invited to look at is the one of the Visitation. More precisely, the one at the beginning of the Visitation, when Mary decides to set out in haste; it is Mary in the audacity of the mission. These steps of Mary are those of the first Christian mission. Mary sets out on the paths of men already carrying the child taking form. She is the missionary full of Jesus; she is the missionary of Jesus. No one can be a missionary unless he has a heart full of Jesus, since he is the one to be announced.

We see Mary when she has scarcely left Nazareth, when she is on the way to the house of Zachary, but has not yet reached it. So she is the model for us, invited to set out for « new lands », without knowing the outcome, without a road map. With confidence in God like her, like Abraham, setting out... But we come after Abraham and Mary and we know that God blesses abundantly these departures for *unknown lands*.

The Capitulants not only looked upon Mary as model, but experienced her presence among them: « Mary made her presence felt in our assembly. She took us by the hand, revealing her maternal love and urging us to go in haste to a new land » (Doc. of the Chapter, pp. 14-15). Same nuance on page 17: « We travel this road with Mary, guide and companion. Her faith and openness to God's will inspire us to undertake this pilgrimage. » The idea of pilgrimage returns often in the Document; it is a pilgrimage with Mary.

The Document contains a beautiful prayer to Mary: in the form of a loving supplication it summarises the message and the fundamental call of the Chapter. This prayer is found at the centre of the Document and divides it into two parts: the spiritual and the more technical. The Brothers of the Chapter turn to Mary in a prayer which comes from the heart. They are truly the sons of Marcellin, who went to Mary as a child goes to his mother. In this prayer, what we put particularly under the protection of our good Mother is the road we have undertaken to travel towards the bicentenary of our foundation:

« Mary,
you are our companion along the way
and the main inspiration for our pilgrimage
towards our Marist Bicentenary. »

35-Mary

In Water from the Rock

Water from the Rock is the document which presents our Marist spirituality. So we would expect to find the Virgin Mary has a prominent place in it. In fact, we relive the first experience of Marcellin: amazed at the love that Jesus and Mary had for him. This experience coloured his whole life, and continues today in our Family.

We find, first of all, a diffuse presence of Mary, which emerges in many articles of the document, insisting on the various mutually enriching Marial nuances which compose the portrait of the Mother of Jesus. It is obvious that Mary is part of the soul of the Marist. Among the most important topics is the reminder that our spirituality is Marial, born in the heart of Marcellin, in his experience of knowing himself deeply loved by Jesus and Mary (7). She is the missionary model the Marist must follow: «Like Mary setting out in haste to the hill country, each week (the first Brothers) went out into the surrounding hamlets to make Jesus known and loved.» (5). This apostolate was a participation in Mary's mission. (11) She inspires in us a new way of being Church: "This Marian Church has the heart of a mother: no one is abandoned.» (114). Mary is also the first disciple, model of hearing the word and keeping it, solicitous for the poor and our human needs (151). Full of gratitude, our hearts sing with her the Magnificat (156).

There are many other aspects of the Virgin Mary scattered through the document's pages, but some are totally reserved for her. Page 30, (articles 25 to 29), recalls all the aspects of our relationship with Mary. We become heirs of the love Marcellin had for her, of his convictions, of the titles he gave her. With him we share the experience of having Mary as our Ordinary Resource: «Without Mary we are nothing and with Mary we have everything, because Mary always has her adorable son within her arms or in her heart.» (25). Marcellin's motto is also ours : «All to Jesus through Mary, all to Mary for Jesus» (25). We have a part in her spiritual maternity and she inspires us in our attitudes to the young, so that these discover the maternal face of Mary. (25-26). Pages 72-73 are again centred on Mary. Here she is regarded as the model of mission, the model of the heart which receives the word and lets it ripen; she is the woman in whom the Spirit dwells, who cries out for justice for the poor; the woman who finds her final dwelling in the Church. (131 to 134).

The whole of Chapter 2, *We journey in faith*, offers an unusual but very beautiful presence of Mary. Each reflection is preceded by a Marial phrase: «The angel of the Lord came to Mary...» (44 to 52), «Rejoice, full of grace...» (53 to 64). Article 90 is the last in the chapter and at the end we find: «I am the handmaid of the Lord...» So our whole journey in faith is in Mary's motherly shadow.

The presentation of our spirituality is completed with a very beautiful prayer taking up the words of the Magnificat. We may close the book, but we remain in Mary's company, we dwell on her prayer, seized by a praise which comes from our heart, a praise that forgets no one and places our whole Marist family under the protection of her who once heard the prayer of Marcellin lost in the snow.

36-Mary and the lay Marist

« *Around the same table* » is the guiding document for lay people committed to living the spirituality of Marcellin Champagnat. Dating to September 2009, it was composed especially by and for lay people.

If we look at how Mary is presented in this document, we notice that it is in a diffuse way throughout the document and in a synthetic way in the five articles 110 to 114. Unlike other writings, such as the *Document of the General Chapter*, *Water from the Rock*, and the *Constitutions*, which have spaces devoted to Mary in many chapters, « *Around the same table* » presents Marial spirituality summarized in a single page, page 73.

In reality, Mary is very frequently presented in a diffuse way. One cannot meet Marcellin without discovering Mary in his life. One cannot be edified by a Brother, or live with Brothers and not know how much Mary inspires their life. This diffuse and discrete presence of Mary is most beautiful; it speaks of an impregnation, before being doctrine, it is life.

Many of the articles are rich with this diffuse presence: « To some of us, God has touched us and has given us a Marist heart » (Art 4). « A third group of persons exist who, after a personal journey of discernment, have decided to live their Christian spirituality and mission in the manner of Mary, following the insight of Marcellin Champagnat » (Art 11). « Living the Marist charism from the perspective of women invites us all to adopt in our lives the Marian elements such as tenacity, stamina, maternal affection, tenderness, attention to detail and intuition in our daily experience » (Art. 25) « Mary and Marcellin encourage me and give me the strength to commit fully to this mission that I have been given, which consists in welcoming, listening to and accompanying the young people... In moments of doubt, when I experience the desire to throw in the towel, I turn to them both. They give me the strength to put into effect the « Yes » that I pronounced one night in the chapel of Our Lady of the Hermitage » (Testimony on pp. 40-41). The first three places: the crib, the cross and the altar, arts 107, 108, 109, tell of the strong presence of the mother. Simplicity, a typically Marial virtue, appears on many pages.

Many other aspects directly linked to the mother of the Lord can be found. « Mary is our example on the road to vocation. She teaches us to integrate life around Jesus, to follow him to the foot of the cross and to savour the happiness of the resurrection » (Art. 148). « Crucial for my growth and discernment are: my love for the Good Mother... » (Testimony, p. 98)... « And, like Mary, we have responded 'Yes'. » (p. 101).

This presence emerges in all its strength when the document trains its regard on Mary in pages 72-73. There we meet her as model, first disciple, a woman of listening, a heart which nourishes the word. She is the lay woman, living a simple and hardworking life, the young girl who sings the Magnificat and claims justice on behalf of the lowly.

Above all, she is the Good Mother, with the child sleeping in her arms, who tells us to allow our maternal heart to beat. Mary enriches us with her tenderness: « With those feelings of compassion, we present to the world the great gift of God made man. » (Art 113).

The same love of Marcellin and the Brothers for the Good Mother springs also in the heart of the lay Marist. As a true Marist, the lay person goes to Christ through Mary, his loving mother, and devotion to her « centers us on Jesus and sustains us on the way of the Gospel » (Art 114).

As a true Marist, he or she says « She is the one who has done everything for us! » Thus Marist Marial spirituality is what identifies those lay people who want to live the charism of Marcellin Champagnat.

Pages 72 and 73 could inspire original Marial celebrations, enrich our recital of the rosary, or find a place in our times of personal prayer. The whole document requires being prayed, and integrated into the spiritual life it is very capable of nourishing.

« *Around the same table* » invites us to a Magnificat, since we are in the presence of a new springtime of Marist vocations.

37-The new land (1)

The Document of the XXI General Chapter is entitled: « *With Mary, go in haste to a new land* ». It summarises what the Capitulants called « *the fundamental call* ». It is a significant thing for us Marists that this call should be placed under the protection of Mary, the first missionary of Christ.

This « *new land* » to which we must go in haste is something of a mystery. It remains a place to be discovered. *It is like a utopia, like the star of the Magi, it is an aptitude for dreaming, a door open on the future.* It awakens new energy. For Abraham the “new land” was the great unknown also. For the people of Israel the « *promised land* » was also at first « a utopia », the first fruit of which was to form from what was only a collection of tribes a people, the people of God. The Magi, in their turn, *believing in their star*, set out towards a *new land*, where the newborn King was waiting for them. Mary also hastened towards the sign given her by Gabriel, unaware of all the graces that awaited her in the house of Elisabeth. This capacity for dreaming appears often in this document: « Together we have dreamed about our future and have discovered the fundamental call that God has for us today » (Doc. of the General Chapter, p. 17). The dream is also strongly present in *Water from the Rock*; the title of art. 155, page 84, is significant: « Seeing new visions, dreaming new dreams. »

« *New land* »? Still, as Pascal makes God say: « You would not be looking for me if you had not already found me ». So we have the feeling that this « *new land* » is in some way not at all unknown to us, but where we have already lived.

« *This new land* » is, above all, the child forming in Mary, who is brand new in her, whom she discovers day after day, and who brings us the eternal novelty of a God who is always young. *Jesus is the new land*, capable of giving us « *new heavens and a new earth* ». Jesus is the first to whom we must go in haste; he is the first to discover, the first in whom we must dwell, and the only new land whom we can help others discover, especially the young. On this route, Mary is the first and she is the mother, for Jesus reveals himself in love. The womb carrying this new land is the Annunciation, the missionary course, the Magnificat: Mary.

But if the way which leads to Jesus is love, there is another land to renew, and that is *our own heart*. Jesus and Mary cause us to journey into *our own inner life*, so that our life may become a sanctuary of the Lord, rich with the single treasure we can offer others. It is in this sense that Br. Emili, S.G. leads his reflection in presenting the Document of the General Chapter: « I doubt very much that such an important challenge on the collective level as « *go in haste, with Mary, to a new land* » can be carried out, if at the same time there is no movement, no interior journey on the part of each one of us. » This land is also quite familiar to us already, yet there are continents to be discovered in ourselves. Mary, who made her heart and her womb the sanctuary of the Word, can be a true guide for us: « *With Mary, go in haste to the new land of our own interior* ».

This route towards the heart is the way that makes *our family* « a new land ». « *New land* », to be cultivated with great care, all the Marist laity inspired by the document *Around the same table*. It is a wholly interior process. Our family can become a new land, crammed with possibilities, if it moves towards Jesus, if it lets itself be inspired by Mary, if it knows how to renew its heart and make it generous.

38-The new land (2)

The fundamental call proposes Mary to us in the haste of the Visitation, in the steps of the first Christian mission. Rich in the treasure named Jesus, heart transformed into a sanctuary of Jesus, Mary takes *the road of humanity*. There is the *fourth new land: others, mankind, humanity*. This land is also familiar to us already and yet it still presents something new every day, with its unknowns, its new dawns, its unexpected storms: *land of life*. Mary already knows the family of Zachary and Elisabeth, and yet there is something new in this family, a child waiting to leap with joy at the voice of her who carries the Lord in her womb. *Land of others* to meet with the newness of Jesus and a renewed heart. Land from which new calls, new challenges come to us, demanding new generosity: missions faraway or near to which to go in haste with Mary.

The General Chapter Document, on page 22, is also explicit about the new lands: « Realize that the idea of going out to a new land carries some implications: sharing the responsibility for mission, giving priority to evangelization, giving preference to the poor and least favoured, and transmitting the Marist charism to a new generation of educators. » The document *Water from the Rock*, in paragraph 149, also tells us: « This experience urges us to move ahead, with courage and apostolic zeal to difficult missions to marginalised areas, and unexplored surroundings, where the seed of the Kingdom has not yet taken root. » Many of the themes of the Chapter Document echo those of *Water from the Rock*.

This « *new land* » requires us to move inwards and outwards. All these new lands hold something unknown, mysterious, surprising; they require, therefore, a heart that is disposable, generous, like that of the Virgin who said Yes. The woman we are asked to look at is the one of the Annunciation, the Visitation and the Magnificat, the one who listened to the Word, said Yes, went out on mission and sang her joy. Mary, first missionary of Christ, takes up in her steps all our missions too. Marcellin Champagnat, who sent out the first Marist missionaries to leave for new lands, teaches us to have confidence in the Good Mother, our Ordinary Resource, and make her the patroness of all our missions.

Abraham, on the way to *a new land*, became the father of all who believe and the ancestor of a people as numerous as the sand of the sea and the stars of the sky.

The people of Israel knew the roads of exile which led them to *new lands*. In those lands, they received the gift of the great prophets and their faith was purified and deepened. It was in exile that they were promised « a new heart and a new spirit ».

Mary hastening to a new mission causes chants of joy and hears for the first time her Son called Lord, or, even better, « my Lord ». This is the typical cry of Christian faith; every Christian says of Jesus that he is « his Lord ».

The Magi, guided by the star, finish their journey at the feet of Jesus on his mother's knees. To him they offer gold, incense and myrrh, gifts which describe the nature of the child: he is king, God, man. In Jesus they find the new way of their life. On this new way they return home, setting out on a whole new future.

God makes a rendez-vous with our family in these « *new lands* », lands of grace, life and future. « Mary, our good Mother, accompanies us with tenderness and sensitivity. May she bless each one of us. » (Br. Emili Turu, S.G. Presentation of the Document of the XXI General Chapter.

A song of Jaca Book, *Leave your land and go*, expresses this idea of a new land well. He asks Abraham, then the apostles, and finally us:

What you are leaving, you know well enough,
But what is your God going to give you?

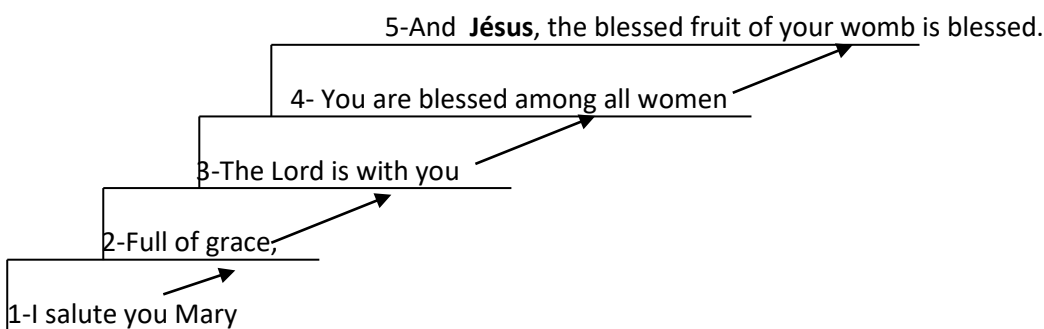
39-THE PURE PERFUME OF THE GOSPEL (1)

Right from the beginning, the *Hail Mary* has been the prayer of the simple. of the people of God who do not know how to read, were invited to recite, The faithful instead of the psalms, 150 *Hail Marys* grouped together in the mysteries of joy, sorrow and glory, thus tracing the life of Jesus. Even today these people, poor in knowledge but rich in faith, have a better knowledge of Mary and of God than well-educated people; they gain from this light which is born from the heart and from simplicity. All the saints walk in the procession of the, as well as the Popes we have known, like Benedict XVI, who recites the *chaplet* every day. In the company of these humble can be found great artists: Palestrina, Schubert, Gounod with their varied interpretations of the *Ave Maria*, and of very numerous paintings which have extolled Mary in the rhythm of the brushes.

This short prayer is also the one most often recited. In Europe, Radio Maria begins its emissions early in the morning and many people gather together at the first morning recitation of the rosary.

This great success was born of demand: “Is this prayer evangelical?” The response is: “Absolutely!”

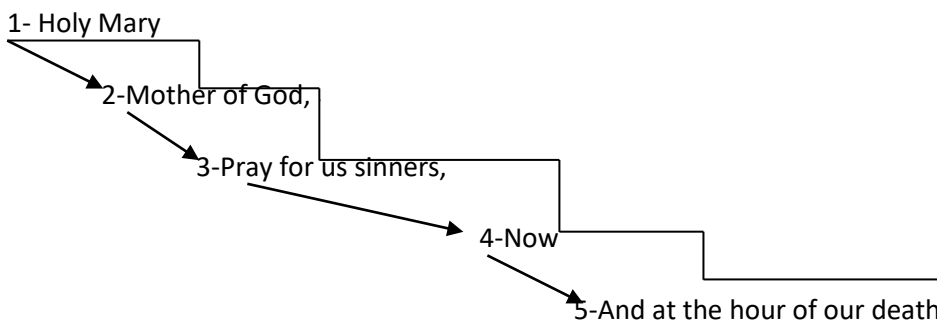
The *Hail Mary* is full of the perfume of the Gospels, perfume which permeates and fills the Church. It places Jesus in the highest and most central part of the prayer. The first part of the *Hail Mary* shows in five ascending steps and at the summit we find Jesus. Having arrived at Jesus, the prayer stops for a moment, then changes to the choir. The steps arise from the angel’s greeting to the praise of the one full of grace, from the full of grace to the affirmation that God is with her, from the blessing of the Mother to the blessing of the child. Mary thus reveals the path leading to the Son, pedestal, monsternace of Jesus.



The second part of the *Hail Mary* is very human and recalls Our Father. This one also is built in two stages: first of all the glorification of the Father, then our needs placed before them, the need for bread, pardon and support in times of trial.

The second part of the *Hail Mary* is very human and recalls the Our Father. This latter is also built in two stages: first of all the glory of the Father, then our needs descend before him, the need for bread, pardon, support in trial.

The second part of the *Hail Mary* also presents itself in five descending steps. They go from the holiness of Mary and join up with now and at the hour of our death, passing through the narrow path whereon sinners walk. It is a quick and dense résumé of our human condition



We ask Mary to extend the mantle of her protection over our whole lives. The glance towards death does not exclude the presence of Calvary, the death of Jesus, the moment when Mary became our Mother, expert in the sorrow and power of her intercession since it was Jesus who constituted her Mother. Yes, this whole table of the second part of the *Hail Mary* is as if attached to Calvary and it compares our death to the death of Jesus. We are fully within the heart of the Gospel.

Then this is a prayer declined in the plural, first person plural, while the first part is in the singular. This is because we are embarked on the same adventure, with many things in common: sin, death, the Church family, Jesus' Mother, the resurrection of the Lord who fills us with certain hope.. If there is a mother, there is also a family. To pray in the plural is to recognise Mary Mother of humanity.

The final Amen does not only conclude the second part, it encompasses also the first: the salutation, the praise of Mary, the blessing and Jesus placed at the summit of Prayer. To the care of the Mother of Jesus we confide the fullness of our lives: now and at the hour of our death, but only after having put Jesus and the heart of our prayer and our faith. The final Amen makes final our agreement to the whole prayer.

The *Hail Mary*' opens as a diptych full of light in the first part and full of shadows of our human fragility in the second part. It is a total montage with Mary heading towards the Son on the first step. It is formed like an ascension with the Mother towards the Son in the first panel. In the second, from the height of her new maternity, Mary inclines herself towards us and embraces the hour of our death.. This moment so human and mysterious, which could be a cause of despair, in the arms of the Mother becomes confidence and peace; it joins up with the death of the Lord and his cross where with open arms, he awaits the splendour of the resurrection.

This prayer begins on the lips of Gabriel and continues on those of Elisabeth. Gabriel is a messenger (in Hebrew *malak*, which means to say angel, messenger), he does not bring his greeting but that of God. Elisabeth not only speaks from her emotions, she is moved by the Holy Spirit. The source of the prayer was in God. If he inspired this prayer, we can consider that he was the first to say it.

It is a prayer that brings together the whole adventure of the greeting. The angel says to Mary what has very often been said to judges, prophets, the poets of the psalms: "The Lord is with thee." But when it is said to Mary: "The Lord is with thee", we are at the moment when all the prophecies are about to become reality: "All God's promises are affirmed in Jesus." (2Cor 1, 20) God positions himself in the human adventure, he is Emmanuel, the Son of the Virgin, the God with us.

Gabriel does not say the name of Mary, but he indicates her spiritual identity such as God wants and sees the young woman.: the identity is to "be full of grace."

In her turn, Elisabeth, inspired, links in the same benediction, in the same blessing, the Mother and the child united in a reciprocal love without limits. Here, Mary is pure image of the Church and of humanity: both are combined in that great blessing that is Jesus; a blessing that closely binds the Church and humanity to Jesus.

In this first part we are in the springtime of the Gospel: the Annunciation, the Visitation, the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. We are in a world of grace and light, of salvation, of God who is already with Mary. The prayer concludes with Jesus.

We are faced with a singular praise because we put ourselves in the place of Gabriel and of Elisabeth; each of us makes this praise our own: I myself also salute the one Full of Grace, I also proclaim that her Son is the Blessed One. My voice unites with the immense choir of the saved.

To ask Mary to intercede for us, is to ask her to be able to share in the resurrection of her Son.

40-Praying to Mary with our Constitutions

“TO FOLLOW CHRIST AS MARY DID” (C.3)

« *To make Mary’s spirit our own, we contemplate the life of our Mother and Model. Our ways of being and acting draw their inspiration and guidance from the attitudes that made her the perfect disciple of Christ*». (C.4)

This paragraph of article 4 of the Constitutions is an invitation to pray to Mary starting from her presence in our Rule of Life.

1. Mary in our daily life.

« *Like Father Champagnat, we go to Mary as a child to its mother.* » (C.74)

- Mary, our Good Mother – *look upon your children united in prayer to you.* (C. 4)
- Our Ordinary Resource, – *we rely on your help in every situation.* (Id.)
- Our Model, – *inspire our ways of being and acting.* (Id.)
- Mary, perfect disciple of Christ (C.4, 84), – *May Jesus become everything in our lives.* (C.7)
- Mary, way for going to Jesus, – *we wish to make you known and loved.* (C.4, 84)
- You who have done everything for us, – *thank you for having chosen us as your little brothers.*

2. Mary and our consecration.

« *As men dedicated to her, we offer heartfelt thanks to her for the grace of our vocation, confident that her intercession will help us to persevere faithfully* ». (C. 18)

- Mary, model of our consecration, – *may our response to God be unconditional.* (Id.)
- Mary, chosen by God to be all his, – *keep us confident in the power of his grace.* (Id.)
- You who gave yourself to the action of the Spirit in joy and love, – *guide us in the following of Christ.* (Id.)
- You who knew the joys and trials of life, – *aid us to live in the world without being of it.* (Id.)
- “In making a place for you in our home”, – *may we learn to be for youth living signs of the Father’s tenderness.* (C. 21)
- Woman who first lived virginity because of Christ, – *be our guide and support in learning to live the chaste life.* (Id.)
- Handmaid of the Lord, – *teach us docility to the Spirit and a lucid and courageous obedience.* (C. 38)

3. Mary and our community.

« *As was the case with the community of the apostles gathered together on Pentecost day, we are conscious of the presence among us of Mary, Mother of the Church* ». (C. 48)

- Mary, mother of the Church – *may our brotherly love be for all a sign of unity.* (Id.)
- Like you, in the Visitation and at Cana, – *we wish to be attentive to the needs of the community and the world.* (Id.)
- Like your life at Nazareth, – *may ours be simple and hardworking.* (Id.)
- You who act with discretion and delicacy, – *teach us the “little virtues” in daily life.* (C.7)

4. Mary and our apostolate.

« *Our attitudes towards young people find their inspiration in Mary, bringing up Jesus at Nazareth. Our apostolic work is a sharing in her spiritual motherhood* ». (C. 84)

- You who brought up Jesus at Nazareth, – *inspire our attitudes towards youth.* (Id.)
- Woman hidden and unknown in the world, – *aid us to evangelise by our lives.* (Id.)
- You who presented Jesus to the shepherds and the Magi, – *help us to show the world the face of the God of love.* (Id.)
- You who, by your prayer, brought forward “the hour” of Jesus, – *may we be joyful heralds of the Gospel.* (Id.)
- You, standing at the foot of the Cross, – *give us courage and confidence in difficulties.* (Id.)
- Mother, knowing how to welcome and wait, – *teach us patience and perseverance in our educational work.* (Id.)

Brother Alain Delorme, Les Avellanes, 23 October 2010

41-We walk toward you

Lourdes, August 1-3, 2011, an enormous crowd fills the esplanade of the Sanctuary: women and men, the sick and their caregivers, young people and those less young, families, young couples, religious, priests, bishops. Everywhere people calmly come and go, to the sources of the water, in front of the grotto, in the basins. In the basilicas the Masses are celebrated in different languages at certain times and places.

All the people of God, especially the simple people, rush to the sanctuaries of the Mother of our Lord. At the international Mass, in the underground Basilica of St. Pius, nearly 20,000 people were present with several priests and a number of bishops. By means of an excellent sound system, readings were given in different languages; a chorus sang the chants with perfection: one felt the joy of praying with this multitude and proud to participate in these beautiful liturgies.

The large number of the faithful without titles, the spontaneity of their prayers, their gestures: drinking Lourdes water, touching the rocks of the grotto, being placed in the baths, lighting the candles, participating in the procession of the Blessed Sacrament among the sick, reciting the rosary holding candles in their hands at the nightly procession, and the long moments of adoration in front of the exposed Blessed Sacrament captivated my attention. The faith of these people reawaked my own and prayer flowed as from a renewed and generous source.

These Christians, who come from all places, know little of the ins and outs of theology, are ignorant of the fine points of exegesis, but they have the sense of faith, spontaneously they are focused on the Mother of the Lord; not on sublime reflections but on simple gestures and a great attention to others, especially to the sick. They do not wonder if Mary is their model, they know it, they know that she is their mother, especially with her they feel renewed within, more human and closer to Jesus.

Occasionally, we religious, priests included, have the tendency to say that Mary is particularly our model, she consecrated herself totally to her Son, she has the title of mother of priests, she, being the mother of the Great Priest, and we keep her for ourselves, leaving the simple faithful empty-handed.

I take these lines from a religious magazine: "If by virtue of her union with Christ and her total disposal to the Spirit, the case of Mary precedes the vocational states, then she is, together with her son, the prototype be it of ordinary life in the world (such as the wife of Joseph and mother in the family of Nazareth), or of consecrated life following Christ. But one must add, according to Hans Urs Von Balthasar, that the Virgin is beyond the first state of spouse and mother of a family and at the second state of being 'consecrated in a radical following' and the latter up taking claim over the former. The Mother also lives, like the Son, the passage from the first to the second state when at the beginning she is guided by the law of the Old Testament toward the community of life with Joseph, then, in the mystery of the crucified Christ, she makes her way toward the supernatural community of election with John." In Mary, then, all possible states of life are reflected for a baptized person, but inside this whole, the call to total consecration to the work of the Son becomes with time more discernable." (La Madonnina di Civitavecchia, July and August 2011, p. 11)

Such a reflection tends to make of the people of God a category of second class Christians; it implies that Mary is the model especially of those who consecrate themselves to Christ, thus religious and priests. Is it impossible for the ordinary Christians to make a total consecration of themselves to Christ?

True virginity, true consecration to Christ, is in the quality of the love that we develop toward him, and yet at first, in the quality of welcome that we give him. This welcome and this love don't know the boundaries of states of life. Married people can live their style of virginity cultivating for Christ an

extremely strong bond. The ordinary Christians say it by filling the sanctuaries, concerning themselves with the ill, living a generosity which goes beyond the boundaries of the reasonable, having a sense of understanding and mercy. In their simplicity and spontaneity they call the religious and priests to a more spontaneous faith and prayer life, less constrained by reason.

There is also the danger of separating in Mary the spouse, the mother and the consecrated woman. This division in the person is not healthy: Mary loves Jesus with all that she is; when she loves Joseph she still loves Jesus, when she asks: "Why did you do that to us?" she loves like a mother her Son who is entering adolescence. When Jesus dies on the cross, Mary is the faithful one, true disciple, but Jesus calls her "woman" and "mother."

Mary is not in the first place the model of disciples without titles, then the model of those who live the priesthood or consecrated life; she remains always the model of all Christians. The people of God of God who have the intuition of it, often get ahead of the religious and priests; many of the devotions and Marial feasts are born among the ordinary people then they are made official by the authorities of the Church.

The people of God remain, under the action of the Spirit, the large reservoir of faith, hope, charity and the devotion to the Mother of the Lord. Then, we are sure, Mary will not withhold her love from any of her children, she will love them according to their needs. We also go toward her, stripped of our titles, simply as her children.

42-Incarnation et humanisation

Nous sommes plus enclins à regarder l'incarnation du Verbe qu'à fixer notre attention sur l'humanisation du Verbe. Nous conduit à cela le Prologue de Jean qui parle que « le Verbe s'est fait chair » (Jn 1, 14) et ce que Paul appelle la « kénose », qu'il chante dans l'hymne de la lettre aux Philippiens, 2, 6-11 : « Il s'est anéanti lui-même... il est devenu semblable aux hommes. »

Incarnation et humanisation vont habituellement de pair et forment un tout inséparable dans la personne. Luc nous le laisse deviner quand il parle de la croissance de l'enfant Jésus : « Cependant l'enfant **grandissait, se fortifiait** et se remplissait de sagesse » (Lc 2, 40). Le corps grandit et devient robuste tandis que l'esprit se remplit de sagesse. Ici Luc souligne davantage la croissance physique : il grandissait, il se fortifiait. Quand de nouveau il posera son regard sur l'enfant qui revient du Temple, à 12 ans, l'évangéliste insistera davantage sur l'aspect psychologique et spirituel : « Quant à Jésus **il croissait en sagesse**, en taille et **en grâce devant Dieu** et devant les hommes » (Lc 2, 52).

L'incarnation est le fait que le Fils de Dieu prend un corps, il se revêt de chair. Dans ce terme domine l'aspect biologique et physique. Il va passer neuf mois dans le sein de sa maman, et comme le dira Paul : « A la plénitude des temps, Dieu envoya son Fils, né de la femme ! ». Encore que tout ceci soit gorgé des valeurs du salut, le regard s'arrête sur le fait que le Verbe assume un corps. Ce corps aura besoin d'être nourri, d'être gardé en bonne santé, il devra croître vers la stature de l'homme adulte, vers la plénitude du corps qui sera exposé à la croix. Il n'y a pas d'homme sans incarnation, sans corps.

L'humanisation du Verbe est tout l'apport affectif et éducatif que Marie et Joseph vont assurer à l'enfant. Pour être homme il faut être aimé, il faut être éduqué. Marie et Joseph vont socialiser l'enfant Jésus. Ils lui transmettent les valeurs, les prières, les rites du peuple juif. C'est par la mère et le père que la culture du peuple de Dieu prend place et grandit dans le cœur et dans l'intelligence de l'enfant. Il faut beaucoup recevoir pour devenir un homme. Et souvent l'homme adulte révèle la capacité éducative des parents, comme le dit le proverbe : « Tel père, tel fils ! ». Beaucoup admirent Jésus ; l'évangile de Marc rebondit d'un étonnement à l'autre, d'une louange à l'autre, d'une demande à l'autre : « Mais qui est-il cet homme ? » Derrière le grand équilibre psychologique de Jésus se cachent les mille conseils de Marie et de Joseph, les mille moments vécus ensemble, les temps de prière. Jésus a grandit en écoutant et en regardant ses propres parents. Nous devons beaucoup de gratitude à Marie et à Joseph. Dans l'humain, ils ont fait grandir Jésus pour qu'il soit apte à être le prophète que nous connaissons.

Pour devenir plus clairement conscients de ce que Marie et Joseph ont donné à l'enfant nous pourrions regarder notre propre cas : combien de moments de vie partagée, d'explications pour comprendre, de lectures, de voyages, de cours, de paroles entendues, de rencontres, avons-nous fondus ensemble pour être l'adulte que nous sommes. Pour réaliser notre portrait d'adulte il a fallu des millions de coups de pinceau, chaque jour apportant son lot, chaque jour modifiant légèrement en nous certaines nuances. Les formateurs mesurent la patience qu'il faut pour faire grandir une personne.

Jésus n'a pas grandit sous l'effet d'un coup de baguette magique, ni sous l'explication trop facile qu'il était Dieu. Il a fallu que son humanité devienne extrêmement ouverte à la divinité. C'est vrai que dans l'humain il est aussi l'œuvre de l'Esprit. Jésus aura toujours en lui la plénitude de l'Esprit. Mais faut-il encore que son humanité devienne come apte à cela.

Nous ne pouvons pas nier à Marie et à Joseph leur travail de parents sur Jésus. Si Marc appelle Jésus « le charpentier » (Mc 6,3), c'est parce que quelqu'un, Joseph, lui a appris ce métier. Marie, la mère, elle a été impliquée dans l'incarnation et dans l'humanisation de son fils. L'humanisation de Jésus a commencé avec le premier acte d'amour de la maman, quand elle parlait à l'enfant qu'elle portait dans son sein, quand elle le caressait, quand elle lui redisait son nom.

L'incarnation et l'humanisation de Jésus conduisent à la gratitude, mais aussi à la prière qui demande à Marie et à Joseph de nous éduquer comme ils l'ont fait pour Jésus.