



The Holy See

ACT OF VENERATION TO THE IMMACULATE AT THE SPANISH STEPS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Saturday, 8 December 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At an event which has now become a tradition, we are meeting here at the Spanish Steps to offer our floral tribute to Our Lady on the day when the whole Church celebrates the feast of her Immaculate Conception. Following in the footsteps of my Predecessors, I also join you, dear faithful of Rome, to pause at Mary's feet with filial affection and love. For 150 years she has watched over our City from the top of this pillar. Today's act is a gesture of faith and devotion which our Christian community repeats from year to year, as if to reaffirm its commitment of fidelity to she who in every circumstance of daily life assures us of her help and motherly protection.

This expression of piety is at the same time an opportunity to offer to all who live in Rome or who are spending a few days as pilgrims and tourists, an opportunity, despite the diversity of cultures, to feel they are one family gathered around a Mother who has shared the daily efforts of every woman and mother of a family. She is, however, a completely singular mother, for she was chosen in advance by God for a unique and mysterious mission: to bring forth to earthly life the Father's Eternal Word, who came into the world for the salvation of all people. And Mary, Immaculate in her conception - this is how we venerate her today -, travelled her earthly pilgrimage sustained by undaunted faith, steadfast hope and humble and boundless love, following in the footsteps of her Son, Jesus. She was close to him with motherly solicitude from his birth to Calvary, where she witnessed his crucifixion, transfixed by suffering but with unwavering hope. She then experienced the joy of the Resurrection, at dawn on the third day, the new day, when the Crucified One left the tomb, overcoming for ever and definitively the power of sin and death.

Mary, in whose virginal womb God was made man, is our Mother! Indeed, from the Cross before bringing his sacrifice to completion, Jesus gave her to us as our Mother and entrusted us to her as her children. This is a mystery of mercy and love, a gift that enriches the Church with fruitful spiritual motherhood. Let us turn our gaze to her, especially today, dear brothers and sisters, and imploring her help, prepare ourselves to treasure all her maternal teaching. Does not our Heavenly Mother invite us to shun evil and to do good, following with docility the divine law engraved in every Christian's heart? Does not she, who preserved her hope even at the peak of her trial, ask us not to lose heart when suffering and death come knocking at the door of our homes? Does she not ask us to look confidently to our future? Does not the Immaculate Virgin exhort us to be brothers and sisters to one another, all united by the commitment to build together a world that is more just, supportive and peaceful?

Yes, dear friends! On this solemn day, the Church once again holds up Mary to the world as a sign of sure hope and of the definitive victory of good over evil. The one whom we invoke as "full of grace" reminds us that we are all brothers and sisters and that God is our Creator and our Father. Without him, or even worse, against him, we human beings will never be able to find the way that leads to love, we will never be able to defeat the power of hatred and violence, we will never be able to build a lasting peace.

May the people of every nation and culture welcome this message of light and hope: may they accept it as a gift from the hands of Mary, Mother of all humanity. If life is a journey and this journey is often dark, difficult and exhausting, what star can illuminate it? In my Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, published at the beginning of *Advent*, I wrote that the Church looks to Mary and calls on her as a "star of hope" (n. 49). During our common voyage on the sea of history, we stand in need of "lights of hope", that is, of people who shine with Christ's light and "so guide us along our way" (*ibid.*). And who could be a better "Star of Hope" for us than Mary? With her "yes", with the generous offering of freedom received from the Creator, she enabled the hope of the millennia to become reality, to enter this world and its history. Through her God took flesh, became one of us and pitched his tent among us.

Thus, inspired by filial trust, we say to her: "Teach us, Mary, to believe, to hope, to love with you; show us the way that leads to peace, the way to the Kingdom of Jesus. You, Star of Hope, who wait for us anxiously in the everlasting light of the eternal Homeland, shine upon us and guide us through daily events, now and at the hour of our death. Amen!".

I join the pilgrims who have gathered at the Marian Shrines of Lourdes and Fourvière to honour the Virgin Mary in this Jubilee Year of the 150th anniversary of Our Lady's apparitions to St Bernadette. Thanks to their trust in Mary and her example, these pilgrims will become true disciples of the Saviour. With their pilgrimages they offer the many faces of the Church to those who are seeking and who come to visit the Shrines. On their spiritual journey they are called to demonstrate the grace of their Baptism, to be nourished with the Eucharist, to find in prayer the

strength for witness and solidarity with all their brothers and sisters in humanity. May shrines develop their vocation to prayer and to offering hospitality to people who desire to rediscover the path to God, especially through the Sacrament of Forgiveness. I also address my cordial greetings to all those, in particular young people, who are joyfully celebrating the feast of the Immaculate Conception, especially to the organizers of the lighting display of the city of Lyon. I ask the Virgin Mary to watch over the inhabitants of Lyon and of Lourdes, and I impart an affectionate Apostolic Blessing to them all as well as to the pilgrims who have joined the celebrations.

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