



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Mary co-operates by personal obedience

1. The Evangelist Luke describes the young Jesus' pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem as the last episode of the infancy narrative, before the start of John the Baptist's preaching. It is an usual occasion which sheds light on the long years of his hidden life in Nazareth.

On this occasion, with his strong personality Jesus reveals that he is aware of his mission, giving to this second "entry" into his "Father's house" the meaning of his total gift of self to God which had already marked his presentation in the temple.

This passage seems to contrast with Luke's note that Jesus was obedient to Joseph and Mary (cf. 2:51). But, if one looks closely, here he seems to put himself in a conscious and almost deliberate antithesis to his normal state as son, unexpectedly causing a definite separation from Mary and Joseph. As his rule of conduct, Jesus states that he belongs only to the Father and does not mention the ties to his earthly family. Jesus' behaviour seemed very unusual

2. Through this episode, Jesus prepares his Mother for the mystery of the Redemption. During those three dramatic days when the Son withdraws from them to stay in the temple, Mary and Joseph experience an anticipation of the triduum of his Passion, Death and Resurrection.

Letting his Mother and Joseph depart for Galilee without telling them of his intention to stay behind in Jerusalem, Jesus brings them into the mystery of that suffering which leads to joy, anticipating what he would later accomplish with his disciples through the announcement of his Passover.

According to Luke's account, on the return journey to Nazareth Mary and Joseph, after a day's traveling, are worried and anguished over the fate of the Child Jesus. They look for him in vain among their relatives and acquaintances. Returning

to Jerusalem and finding him in the temple, they are astonished to see him “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions” (Lk 2:46). His behaviour seems most unusual. Certainly for his parents, finding him on the third day means discovering another aspect of his person and his mission.

He takes the role of teacher, as he will later do in his public life, speaking words that arouse admiration: “And all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers” (2:47). Revealing a wisdom that amazes his listeners, he begins to practise the art of dialogue that will be a characteristic of his saving mission.

His Mother asked Jesus: “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously” (Lk 2:48). Here we can discern an echo of the “whys” asked by so many mothers about the suffering their children cause them, as well as the questions welling up in the heart of every man and woman in times of trial.

3. Jesus’ reply, in the form of a question, is highly significant: “How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Lk 2:49).

With this response, he discloses the mystery of his person to Mary and Joseph in an unexpected, unforeseen way, inviting them to go beyond appearances and unfolding before them new horizons for his future.

In his reply to his anguished Mother, the Son immediately reveals the reason for his behaviour. Mary had said: “Your father”, indicating Joseph; Jesus replies: “My Father”, meaning the heavenly Father.

Referring to his divine origin, he does not so much want to state that the temple, his Father’s house, is the natural “place” for his presence, as that he must be concerned about all that regards his Father and his plan. He means to stress that his Father’s will is the only norm requiring his obedience.

This reference to his total dedication to God’s plan is highlighted in the Gospel text by the words: “I must be”, which will later appear in his prediction of the Passion (cf. Mk 8:31).

His parents then are asked to let him go and carry out his mission wherever the heavenly Father will lead him.

4. The Evangelist comments: “And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them” (Lk 2:50). Mary and Joseph do not perceive the sense of his answer, nor the way (apparently a rejection) he reacts to their parental concern. With this attitude, Jesus intends to reveal the mysterious aspects of his intimacy with the Father, aspects which Mary intuitively senses without knowing how to associate them with the trial she is undergoing.

Luke’s words teach us how Mary lives this truly unusual episode in the depths of her being. She

“kept all these things in her heart” (Lk 2:51). The Mother of Jesus associates these events with the mystery of her Son, revealed to her at the Annunciation, and ponders them in the silence of contemplation, offering her co-operation in the spirit of a renewed “fiat”.

In this way the first link is forged in a chain of events that will gradually lead Mary beyond the natural role deriving from her motherhood, to put herself at the service of her divine Son’s mission.

At the temple in Jerusalem, in this prelude to his saving mission, Jesus associates his Mother with himself; no longer is she merely the One who gave him birth, but the Woman who, through her own obedience to the Father’s plan, can co-operate in the mystery of Redemption.

Thus keeping in her heart an event so charged with meaning, Mary attains a new dimension of her co-operation in salvation.

To the English-speaking visitors and pilgrims, the Holy Father said:

I am pleased to welcome the English-speaking visitors present at today’s Audience, especially the pilgrims from Australia and the United States. I also thank the choirs for their praise of God in song. Upon all of you I cordially invoke the joy and peace of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Saviour of the world.

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