



The Holy See

POPE JOHN PAUL II GENERAL AUDIENCE *Wednesday, 23 April 1997* **To the disciple he said, 'Behold your Mother'**¹. After recalling the presence of Mary and the other women at the Lord's cross, St John relates: "When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!'. Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!'" (Jn 19:26-27). These particularly moving words are a "revelation scene": they reveal the deep sentiments of the dying Christ and contain a great wealth of meaning for Christian faith and spirituality. At the end of his earthly life, as he addressed his Mother and the disciple he loved, the crucified Messiah establishes a new relationship of love between Mary and Christians. Interpreted at times as no more than an expression of Jesus' filial piety towards his Mother whom he entrusts for the future to his beloved disciple, these words go far beyond the contingent need to solve a family problem. In fact, attentive consideration of the text, confirmed by the interpretation of many Fathers and by common ecclesial opinion, presents us, in Jesus' twofold entrustment, with one of the most important events for understanding the Virgin's role in the economy of salvation. The words of the dying Jesus actually show that his first intention was not to entrust his Mother to John, but to entrust the disciple to Mary and to give her a new maternal role. Moreover, the epithet "woman", also used by Jesus at the wedding in Cana to lead Mary to a new dimension of her existence as Mother, shows how the Saviour's words are not the fruit of a simple sentiment of filial affection but are meant to be put at a higher level.² Although Jesus' death causes Mary deep sorrow, it does not in itself change her normal way of life: in fact, in departing from Nazareth to start his public life, Jesus had already left his Mother alone. Moreover, the presence at the Cross of her relative, Mary of Clopas, allows us to suppose that the Blessed Virgin was on good terms with her family and relatives, by whom she could have been welcomed after her Son's death. Instead, Jesus' words acquire their most authentic meaning in the context of his saving mission. Spoken at the moment of the redemptive sacrifice, they draw their loftiest value precisely from this sublime circumstance. In fact, after Jesus' statements to his Mother, the Evangelist adds a significant clause: "Jesus, knowing that all was now finished...." (Jn 19:28), as if he wished to stress that he had brought his sacrifice to completion by entrusting his Mother to John, and in him to all men, whose Mother she becomes in the work of salvation.³ The reality brought about by Jesus' words, that is, Mary's new motherhood in relation to the disciple, is a further sign of the great love that led Jesus to offer his life for all people. On Calvary this love is shown in the gift of a mother, his mother, who thus becomes our mother too. We must remember that, according to tradition, it is John whom the Blessed Virgin in fact recognized as her son; but this privilege has been interpreted by Christians from the beginning as the sign of a spiritual generation in relation to all humanity. The universal motherhood of Mary, the "Woman" of the wedding at Cana and of Calvary, recalls Eve, "mother of all living" (Gn 3:20). However, while the latter helped to bring sin into the world, the new Eve, Mary, co-operates in the saving event of Redemption. Thus in the Blessed Virgin the figure of "woman" is rehabilitated and her motherhood takes up the task of spreading the new life in Christ among men. In view of this mission, the Mother is asked to make the acutely painful sacrifice of accepting her only Son's death. Jesus' words: "Woman, behold your son" enable Mary to sense the

new maternal relationship which was to extend and broaden the preceding one. Her “yes” to this plan is therefore an assent to Christ’s sacrifice, which she generously accepts by complying with the divine will. Even if in God’s plan Mary’s motherhood was destined from the start to extend to all humanity, only on Calvary, by virtue of Christ’s sacrifice, is its universal dimension revealed. Jesus’ words, “Behold, your son”, effect what they express, making Mary the mother of John and of all the disciples destined to receive the gift of divine grace.⁴ On the Cross Jesus did not proclaim Mary’s universal motherhood formally, but established a concrete maternal relationship between her and the beloved disciple. In the Lord’s choice we can see his concern that this motherhood should not be interpreted in a vague way, but should point to Mary’s intense, personal relationship with individual Christians. May each one of us, precisely through the concrete reality of Mary’s universal motherhood, fully acknowledge her as our own Mother, and trustingly commend ourselves to her maternal

love.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, the Holy Father said: I offer a cordial greeting to the students and teachers from the Lutheran Church of Norway. I also thank the choirs for their praise of God in song. Upon all the English-speaking visitors, especially the pilgrims from England, Scotland, Botswana, Korea, the Philippines, Canada and the United States, I cordially invoke the joy and peace of Jesus Christ our risen

Saviour.

The Holy Father again appealed for peace in Zaire: Once again my affectionate yet sorrowful thoughts turn to Zaire and all its people, who continue to suffer even in this Easter season, which should be a time of joy. I insistently ask all the parties involved in the conflict to agree to honest dialogue and real negotiations, co-operating with the international community’s efforts so that hostilities may be brought to an end as soon as possible and the path to authentic democracy may be taken up again. Only in this way will so many innocent people be spared further and graver suffering! I would like to call everyone’s attention to the tragedy of the Rwandan refugees, which seems never-ending: I beg that they may be provided with the aid they need! I ask that their repatriation in dignity, safety and justice be facilitated, and that no obstacles or hindrance interrupt the plans arranged for this purpose! Let us raise our unanimous prayer to the risen Christ, victor over hatred and death, that the peace he intends to give as an Easter gift to Zaire and all humanity may be welcomed by renewed and reconciled hearts. Copyright © Libreria Editrice Vaticana